



Pepperdine University  
Pepperdine Digital Commons

---

Theses and Dissertations

---

2012

## Perceptions, motivations and barriers of earning a high school diploma and achieving higher education among African American and Latino adult students

Lisa Fears-Hackett

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/etd>

---

### Recommended Citation

Fears-Hackett, Lisa, "Perceptions, motivations and barriers of earning a high school diploma and achieving higher education among African American and Latino adult students" (2012). *Theses and Dissertations*. 320.

<https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/etd/320>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [Katrina.Gallardo@pepperdine.edu](mailto:Katrina.Gallardo@pepperdine.edu), [anna.speth@pepperdine.edu](mailto:anna.speth@pepperdine.edu), [linhgavin.do@pepperdine.edu](mailto:linhgavin.do@pepperdine.edu).

Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

PERCEPTIONS, MOTIVATIONS AND BARRIERS OF EARNING A HIGH SCHOOL  
DIPLOMA AND ACHIEVING HIGHER EDUCATION AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN  
AND LATINO ADULT STUDENTS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy

by

Lisa Fears-Hackett

October 2012

Robert R. Barner, Ph.D.—Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Lisa Fears-Hackett

Under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Doctoral committee:

Robert R. Barner, Ph.D., Chairperson

Linda Purrington, Ed.D.

Paul Foster, Ed.D.

© Copyright by Lisa Fears Hackett 2012

All Rights Reserved

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	viii
DEDICATION .....	ix
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	x
VITA .....	x
ABSTRACT .....	xiii
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Background .....	1
Statement of Problem .....	7
Statement of the Purpose .....	8
Research Questions .....	9
Importance of Study .....	9
Delimitations of the Study .....	10
Limitations of the Study .....	11
Assumptions .....	11
Definition of Terms .....	12
Organization of the Study .....	14
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	15
History of Public Education and Dropout Rates .....	15
History of Adult Education .....	18
Purpose of Adult Education: Pathway to a High School Diploma .....	21
Advantages of an Education: Increased Earning Potential and Standard of Living .....	23
Intra-racial Discrimination .....	24
Background of African American and Latino Discrimination .....	27
Barriers to Success .....	30
College Readiness .....	31
Emotional and Environmental Impact .....	33
Parental Influences and Family Issues .....	34
Resiliency .....	35
Chapter 3: Research Methodology .....	36
Restatement of the Problem .....	36
Research Study Design .....	37
Participants .....	40
Instrumentation and Materials .....	43
Data Collection Procedures .....	45
Validity .....	50
Analysis of Data .....	50

	Page
Limitations of Study .....	51
Summary .....	51
Chapter 4: Data Collection and Analysis.....	52
Introduction.....	52
Analysis of Demographic and Student Motivation Data .....	53
Research Question One.....	56
Research Question Two .....	57
Research Question Three .....	60
Summary of Findings.....	74
Chapter 5: Findings, Analysis, and Recommendations .....	79
Overview .....	79
Restatement of the Problem.....	79
Statement of Purpose .....	80
Research Design and Methodology .....	80
Summary and Analysis of Findings for Research Question One .....	81
Summary and Analysis of Findings for Research Question Two.....	82
Summary and Analysis of Findings for Research Question Three.....	84
Summary of Key Findings.....	86
Conclusions.....	86
Recommendations for Future Research.....	87
Policy Recommendations.....	88
Conclusion .....	89
REFERENCES .....	92
APPENDIX A: Adult Student Survey/Questionnaire Demographics .....	100
APPENDIX B: Adult Student Motivation Survey Questionnaire .....	102
APPENDIX C: Interview Protocol for Adult Students.....	103
APPENDIX D: Script for Conducting Adult Student Surveys.....	104
APPENDIX E: Script for Conducting Adult Student Interviews .....	105
APPENDIX F: Superintendent or Designee Permission to Conduct Study .....	107
APPENDIX G: Director of Adult and Career Technical Education Permission to Conduct Study .....	109
APPENDIX H: 2nd Call Founder or Designee Permission to Conduct Study.....	111
APPENDIX I: Experts for Validation of Survey and Interview Protocol .....	113
APPENDIX J: Introductory Assembly with Adult Diploma Students .....	114
APPENDIX K: Adult Students Consent Form – Interview.....	115
APPENDIX L: Adult Students Consent Form – Surveys.....	117
APPENDIX M: List of Motivations – Matched to Authors .....	119

	Page
APPENDIX N: Topics Covered/Exact Interview Question .....	120
APPENDIX O: Survey Questions Matched to Research Questions.....	121
APPENDIX P: Expert Panel of Adult Education Teachers.....	123
APPENDIX Q: National Dropout Data .....	124

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. California Statewide Dropout Rate by Ethnicity .....	17
Table 2. Median Annual Earnings of All Full-Time, Full-Year Wage and Salary Workers Ages 25-34, By Sex And Educational Attainment: Selected Years, 1980–2006.....	24
Table 3. Characteristics of Qualitative Research.....	39
Table 4. Research Question Matrix .....	44
Table 5. Frequency Counts for Selected Variables ( $N = 93$ ) .....	54
Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Selected Variables .....	56
Table 7. Reasons for Dropping Out of High School Sorted by Highest Frequency ( $N = 93$ ) .....	56
Table 8. Frequency Counts for Reasons Given for Returning to Adult School Sorted by Highest Frequency ( $N = 100$ ).....	57
Table 9. Breakdown of Interviewees by Ethnicity and Gender ( $N = 6$ ) .....	60
Table Q1. Status Dropout Rates of 16- Through 24-Year-Olds in the Civilian, Noninstitutionalized Population, by Race/Ethnicity: Selected Years, 1980-2009.....	124



## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Discrimination in America. ....	28

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated in memory of my cousin Garrick King. He was a father, son, brother and United States Army veteran. He was a wonderful person that always put a smile on everyone's face. I have also dedicated this paper to all people, regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status or that time has passed by, but decided to persevere against all odds to make your dreams become a reality. It is dedicated to all the parents, guardians, mentors, administrators, educators, advisors, counselors, friends, husbands, wives, boyfriends, girlfriends, partners, and teachers that never gave up on your child, loved ones or students. You kept motivating and encouraging them to continue and persevere beyond what they thought they could accomplish. You never stopped trying and hoping, even when you didn't see a glimpse of hope, but you knew deep down that they had a champion inside waiting to leap out. I thank you for saving the lives of the ones who could have fallen through the cracks of life and the educational system. Now we can motivate others to strive to reach their potential.

To my loving husband who has continued to encourage me to complete this dissertation and my book; who shared our life with my computer and books on several occasions. You always made me comfortable taking time away from you to write this paper. To my mother and father who never stopped believing in me and made me believe in myself. To my high school teacher Mr. William Sweatt, who told me I could go to college. To my college professor Dr. Fred Rodriguez, who saw something in me that I did not see in myself and awakened my inner lifelong learner. To Monique Young, D'Amato Tyson, Chase Price, Corey Price, Azriel Hackett, Porschia and Garland Wilson Jr, never give up on your dreams. To Star, Valarie and Vickye, thanks for keeping me motivated.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my Lord Jesus Christ for proving me with my parents and a wonderful support system. My mother who never gave up on me, though I stuttered from the time I could speak. And I did not know I was dyslexic at the time but it took eight years to complete my bachelor's degree in communicative disorders from California State University Fullerton after attending Alabama A&M University, Southwest College and El Camino College. My mother always encouraged me to continue in school, no matter what my grades looked like or how much I struggled to complete assignments.

To my dissertation committee: Dr. Barner, Dr. Purrington, and Dr. Foster for your support and guidance through my dissertation journey. Each committee member was patience as well as understanding and provided constructive feedback.

I would like to thank and acknowledge Dr. Tom Granoff for guiding me through chapter 3, the methodology section of this dissertation.

I would like to acknowledge my principal Dr. Vince Carbino who was a source of strength and gave of his time to encourage me through this process.

A special thanks to the expert panel: Immanuel Fears, adult school English teacher; Steward Oatman, adult school Social Studies teacher; Michelle Nicoles, adult school English teacher, Syed Mutani, adult school Math teacher.

Finally, to Gary McHenry, superintendent and Sherryl Carter, Director of Adult Education, for providing me with the opportunity to conduct my research in the very neighborhood in which I grew up. Giving back to my community has and will always be an important part of my life.

## VITA

## EDUCATION

Pepperdine University, Graduate School of Education and Psychology Doctorate of Education in Leadership, Administration and Policy	2012
California State University, Dominguez Hills Master of Arts, Educational Administration	2001
National University Master of Science, Special Education	1995
California State University, Fullerton Bachelor of Arts, Communicative Disorder	1989

## EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Los Angeles Unified School District Teacher Advisor	2010 - Present
National University Adjunct Professor	1999 - Present
Inglewood Community Adult School Assistant Principal	2004 - 2010
University of California, Los Angeles – Extension Adjunct Professor	1999 - 2000
Los Angeles Unified School District Special Education Teacher/Advisor/G.E.D. Examiner	1988 - 2005

## PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS

University of California, Los Angeles Clear Teaching Credential – ESL, Social Sciences, Elementary and Secondary Basic Skills	2002
California State University, Dominguez Hills Clear Administrative Services Credential	2002
University of California, Los Angeles Clear Teaching Credential – Handicapped/Communication	1989

## PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Association of California School Administrators (ACSA)

Women Educators (WE), Los Angeles Unified School District

Association of Pan African Doctoral Scholars (APADS)

Society of Educators and Scholars

Phi Delta Kappa

## PRESENTATIONS

Fears-Hackett, L. (2011). California Association of Professors and Educational Administration Conference (CAPEA). Doctoral student poster session. Perceptions, Motivations and Barriers of Earning a High School Diploma and Achieving Higher Education among African American and Latino Adult Students. San Diego, September 2011.

Fears, L. and Neufeld D. (2008) The Use of Innovative Software for Students with Learning Disabilities. Paris, July 2008.

Fears, L. and Neufeld D. (2008) Society of Educators and Scholars. The Use of Technology for Teachers with Learning Disabilities Who Succeed & Share with Their Students. Malibu, March 2008

Fears, L. and Neufeld D. (2008) International Educational Conferences. Innovative Software for Learning Disabled Students. Hawaii, January 2008.

Fears, L. and Poole, L. (1997) Staff Development Seminar: Providing Alternative Instructional Strategies to Assist Chronically Mentally Ill Learner to Succeed. Los Angeles Unified School District- Adult Education Conference.

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes the motivations, perspectives, and barriers of adult learners returning to school to receive a high school diploma after previously dropping out of a traditional high school setting. Specifically, this study explored the backgrounds, discrimination factors, income variables, perspectives, and environmental and emotional influences of African American and Latino adult high school dropouts. The researcher identified adult students with aspirations of higher education, some of whom lacked the requisite knowledge about and guidance regarding the process of entering college or higher education.

The U.S. high school dropout rate has increased dramatically in recent years, especially among African-American and Latino students. Nearly 6.2 million students in the United States between the ages of 16 and 24 dropped out of high school in recent years. Seventy percent of all students in California graduate from high school with a diploma in 4 years, whereas 30% of California high school students are considered non-graduates or dropouts. Little to no research has been done to identify the reasons or motivations for adult students returning to school to receive their high school diploma. Most research regarding adult students is related to the GED or community colleges. Completing a high school education is essential in order to access higher education and training for the labor force (Sum, Khatiwada, & McLaughlin, 2009).

Moreover, minority students have inundated community adult schools and community colleges at a remarkable rate. These students are now adults that are confronted with issues of having to return to school while working full time jobs, taking care of children, dealing with ill or absent parents, and taking a high school exit exam

that may not have existed during their original time in high school. Many statistical studies have been conducted on the percentages of the dropout rates among minorities, but very few studies have researched this specific adult target group. This sequential mixed methods approach used surveys and in-depth interviews to analyze data, providing information and suggestions for adult school administrators striving to close the graduation gap among these subgroups.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Background

“In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity, it is a pre-requisite” (The White House: Office of the Press Secretary, 2009, para. 1). Historically, a formal education has been one of the most coveted accomplishments for African Americans and Latinos. The early 20th century is replete with examples of individuals who displayed an unquenchable desire to become educated. During the enslavement of African Americans in the United States, many slaves risked their lives to learn to read and write. After the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, former slaves flooded the classrooms to capacity in Savannah, Georgia, though there was no scientific “correlation between literacy and employment” (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990, p. 251) at the time. Furthermore, after the Mexican American war ended in 1848, several court cases showed that Spanish-speaking children were discriminated against, and their families fought the legal system to educate their children. The cases include: *Independent School District v. Salvatierra* (1930-1931), *Alvarez v. Lemon Grove School District* (1931), *Mendez v. Westminster School District* (1946-1947) and *Delgado et al. v. Bastrop Independent School District of Bastrop County et al.* (1948; Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006). In the years ahead, education would become a doorway of opportunity and lasting freedom.

Even in light of these examples, African Americans and Latinos have experienced barriers when trying to reach educational goals. During the mid-1900s, numerous African American and Latino adults had to forgo their education to help support their families. In



recent years, adult students have begun returning to school to complete high school and receive a diploma. Thirty percent of high school dropouts eventually return to school to receive their high school diploma (Denton, 1987). Adult schools offer classes to allow students the flexibility of attending school during the day, evening, or weekends, thereby broadening their opportunities for educational success. For many years, their quest for a high school diploma and college degree exposed African Americans and Latinos to discrimination; nevertheless, these two groups persevered with great optimism. Many African Americans and Latinos pursued an education as if their lives depended on it. In fact, their indomitable fortitude suggests that their lives, at some level, may have actually depended upon obtaining a high school diploma and a college degree. Parents of young African Americans and Latinos viewed these accomplishments as a means of freedom for themselves, their children, and their grandchildren (Cruz, 2009). For the two cultures, a high school and college education would help to define a line of separation between generational chains of poverty and promising steps of opportunity. Furthermore, academic achievement would serve as an equalizer that would ultimately bring about mainstream recognition and acceptance for future generations of African Americans and Latinos.

**The present pursuit of education.** Unfortunately, even in light of past successes, many African Americans and Latinos today are not enjoying the same academic achievements of their predecessors. African American college enrollment, educational performance, and attainment of a college degree continues to fall significantly below their Asian and White counterparts (Allen, Bonous-Hammarth, & Teranishi, 2002). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, only 20.0% of African

Americans and 13.9% of Latinos over the age of 25 had completed a 4-year degree (Chapman, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2010). Research on Latinos points to an invisible ceiling (i.e., barrier) of blocked opportunities that would leave “them progressively vulnerable to academic failure” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 3). Multiple obstacles exist for Latinos students trying to achieve educational growth, such as: fear of being undocumented, racial stereotyping, socioeconomic status, language barriers, and gangs. Many of these students are the first in their families to graduate high school. Therefore, they receive no guidance from other family members as to what is needed to graduate.

Educational statistics appear dismal for these ethnic groups throughout the United States (De Cos, 2005). As conditions worsen, educational budget cuts throughout the state of California threaten to eliminate programs and close adult education centers. District officials and educators often have opposing views when considering to get rid of adult school programs that are critical to many communities while struggling to make painful budget cuts in an attempt to keep K-12 education alive. Adult school fees are minimal to no cost at all, but the schools are being shut down due to educational budget cuts. Not all adult students will be able to afford the cost of community colleges or private trade schools. Admittedly, it is a complex attempt to trim school budgets, but as the debates continue, some African American and Latino adult students will leave the educational system for good and some will be forced out.

Some of the students dropping out do not completely vanish from the school system (Berliner & Barrat, 2009). Community adult schools or adult education centers have become a bridge between high school dropouts and their completion of high school graduation requirements to obtain a high school diploma. Community adult schools and

adult education centers “serve parents and community members in numerous positive ways, thousands of high school students are provided an opportunity to graduate with their classmates” (Associated Administrators of Los Angeles, 2012, p. 6). In addition, adult schools offer adult students the opportunity to re-enroll in the adult high school diploma program to make up their graduation requirements. Adult schools offer adult students another chance to receive a high school diploma.

Many dropouts who return to adult school find additional graduation requirements blocking their path. One of the most recent barriers to complete of high school education is the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), which evaluates a student’s grasp of Mathematics and English Language Arts skills. The writing section evaluates grammar, spelling, comprehension of literature, vocabulary skills, and informational reading skills using multiple-choice questions. The test also assesses math students’ understanding of algebra, geometry, probability, and analysis of data and statistics (California Department of Education, 2008b). Though state laws were passed in 1999 to develop a standardized high school exit test, it was not offered until 2001 and became a graduation requirement in 2006. In the past, high school students concentrated on 3-4 years of school, matriculated through the process, and received a high school diploma. In current years, many students in the same time frame do not earn enough credits to graduate. Other students have enough units to graduate but are unable to complete the CAHSEE. These students are seeking institutions that offer CAHSEE preparation classes that will provide the skills to pass the exit examination. According to the California Department of Education (2011), African American and Hispanic students have improved their CAHSEE scores by more than 6%. Yet, for the class of 2011, CAHSEE requirements by

subgroups illustrate that African Americans and Latinos have the lowest percentage passing rate for 10th, 11th and 12th grades. Many African American and Latino high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors are seeking alternative pathways of achieving enough credits to complete a high school diploma, take CAHSEE prep classes, and walk the stage with their graduating class. Many of these students have dreams of not only attending, but also graduating from college.

Additionally, the accountability component of President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires students to meet recognized standards and reduce the achievement gap between diverse groups (Thornton, Hill, & Usinger, 2006). "The law states that all groups of students must demonstrate academic mastery by 2013-2014" (Thornton et al., 2006, p.116). However, countless students are falling between the cracks of NCLB, some do not have the skills to pass the CAHSEE, and are walking away from high school altogether.

According to Kollars (2008), 41.6% of African Americans and 30.3% of Hispanics/Latinos statewide have dropped out of school. Kollars notes that "some students are considered neither dropouts or graduates. Varying numbers transfer to private school, leave the state, earn a high school equivalence certificate or die" (p. 19A). The California Department of Education (CDE, 2008a) states that 24% of learners did not complete high school in the 2006-2007 school year. It does not matter the number of students dropping out, however; "one is too many, and the data reveals a disturbingly high dropout rate for Latinos and African Americans" (p. 1).

Reports also indicate that finances influence the high school dropout rates of African Americans and Latinos. For example, in low-income areas, the graduate may be

the first in his/her family to achieve such an accomplishment. Barriers to attaining a high school diploma and or a college degree often exist in low income areas, such as: inadequate academic preparation, lack of awareness of college admission requirements, lack of support from family, gang pressures, family's undervalue of education, working to help support the family, and family crisis (Berliner & Barrat, 2009; Bridgeland, Dilulio & Morison, 2006; Fine, 1991a; Grossnickle, 1986). While many students are trying to graduate from high school, these same students are not prepared for either college or work (ACT, 2004).

**African Americans and Latinos in higher education.** In recent years, the cost of achieving a higher education has become extremely difficult for most low-income families. According to Porter (2002), "The risk is especially large for low-income families who have a difficult time making ends meet without the additional burden of college tuition and fees" (p. 1). Many students cannot attend college because their families need the extra income to support the household. Porter also notes, "many wonder whether the high cost of tuition, the opportunity cost of choosing college over full-time employment, and the accumulation of thousands of dollars of debt is, in the long run, worth the investment" (p. 1). The American Council on Education reports that a quarter of students hold down a full-time job while attending college (Levinson, 2002).

Given the aforementioned data, the dropout rates of African Americans and Latinos have led to much speculation and many generalizations with regard to why these groups do not graduate from high school and are not ready for college (Sum, Khatiwada, & McLaughlin, 2009). Additionally, in most instances, the affected teachers never see the students after they have left school and are therefore not aware of the real reasons why

the students did not return. Therefore, it is important to gather data addressing the decisions that lead students to forgo their education. This data would help to dispel stereotypical notions (e.g., intellectual inability to complete) about African American and Latino capabilities, create continuing support from all relevant sectors of society, and encourage equitable access to educational opportunities.

In an effort to provide this missing critical data, this study examined actual adult student perspectives regarding the high school diploma and college degree. These insights came from former high school dropouts who were returning to community adult schools in the state of California in order to obtain their high school diplomas and prepare for higher education. What the students reveal will benefit educators as well as other students so that all parties can make informed decisions before students drop out of school, resulting in an improved educational process.

### **Statement of Problem**

The high school dropout rate has increased dramatically in recent years, especially among African-American and Latino students (Berliner & Barrat, 2009). These students have inundated the community adult schools and community colleges at a remarkable rate. These students are now adults, confronted with issues of having to return to school while working full time jobs, taking care of children, dealing with ill or absent parents, and taking a high school exit exam that may not have been in existence during their original time in high school. Although many studies have been conducted about the reasons students drop out of high school, few studies have examined adult student perceptions, motivations, barriers, and attitudes regarding obtaining a high school

diploma and or a higher education (Berliner & Barrat, 2009; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Fine, 1991a; Sum et al., 2009).

Nieto (1994) asserts that “discussions about developing strategies to solve educational problems lack the perspectives of one of the very groups they most affect – students, especially those students who are categorized as ‘problems’ and are most oppressed by traditional educational structures and procedures” (p. 392). To date, there is little data regarding adult school students’ perceptions of a high school diploma (Nieto, 1994). Because adult schools allow dropouts to make up credits needed to graduate, they assist the district in closing the graduation gap. This research is specifically related to adult students re-enrolling in adult school to make up credits to complete their high school graduation requirements. This study is innovative and will hopefully assist adult school administrators striving to close the graduation gap among adult student subgroups.

### **Statement of the Purpose**

It is well documented that many African American and Latino students drop out of high school before their graduation day (Berliner & Barrat, 2009). However, studies that seek to define adult student perceptions of a high school diploma and college access are lacking (Nieto, 1994). Research indicates that the topic of student dropout is an ongoing problem (Grossnickle, 1986; Titone, 1982; Waggoner, 1991). The purpose of this study is to discover the perceptions, motivation, and barriers related to students returning to school to obtain their high school diploma. It will also identify students’ reasons and motivations to attend college or higher education. Goodman and Leiman (2007) explain that the process of a student and his/her family navigating through the college entrance procedure can have several setbacks in understanding the course of

action; these families “are often adrift and seemingly rudderless” (p. xv). Many families that do not understand the process of how their child should apply to college and do not have the resources needed to obtain this information. This study was conducted at the Inglewood Community Adult School’s south side campus and in the inner-city organization 2nd Call (n.d.): a community-based organization designed to assist in the personal development of individuals who are at risk youth, ex-felons, parolees, and others similarly situated.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions used to guide this study were:

1. What are the reasons given by adult school students for returning to adult school to receive a high school diploma?
2. How the reasons, if at all, given by the students are related to their demographic characteristics?
3. How do adult school seniors perceive the value of obtaining a high school diploma, higher education, vocational certification, or a college degree?

### **Importance of Study**

This study identified reasons adult learners return to adult education schools to receive a high school diploma after previously dropping out of a traditional high school setting. This mixed methods study sought to provide insight to adult educators, counselors, teachers, and administrators to better understand students’ perceptions, motivations, and barriers related to receiving a diploma. The researcher hopes that the results of this study will promote greater retention of adult students until they graduate. This dissertation also contributed to adult school research in the area of encouraging



students to return to school to complete their high school diploma. This study was based on the learners' perceptions of obtaining a high school diploma and going to college or other forms of higher education. These are necessary data since the majority of adult education research deals with adults preparing for the GED or students at the college level (Camenson, 2008; Knowles, 1962).

### **Delimitations of the Study**

This study was limited to students at the Inglewood Community Adult School and living in the surrounding areas. Therefore, the results may not be pertinent to schools in other regions or districts. For the purpose of this study, only students age 18 and older were surveyed and or interviewed. The literature indicates students dropping out of high school is a major problem. However, this study focuses on adult students' unique perspectives in their quest to return to school for a high school diploma and higher education. Moreover, the researcher recognizes that the adult educational system has other programs like Adult Basic Education (ABE), Citizenship, English-as-a-Second Language (ESL), High School Diploma (HSD), General Educational Development (GED), Career Technical Education (CTE), Job Training, Parenting, Older Adults, and Adults with Disabilities classes, but these programs were determined to be beyond the scope of this study. Adult schools within Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) offer the eighth grade diploma to students transitioning from ESL to the high school diploma program. The Inglewood Community Adult School does not offer the eighth grade diploma. Students are eligible for an eighth grade diploma when they meet the minimum requirements in agreement with LAUSD and E.C. 48070.5 (Los Angeles Unified School District [LAUSD], 2007). While freshman, sophomores, and juniors

attend adult school as well, those who had not obtained the status of senior were not included in this study. To limit the scope of this study, only seniors ready to attend higher education or the workforce were included. An adult school senior needs to have close to the required 170 credits needed to graduate from a community adult school to be identified with the class ranking of senior. Community adult schools do not accept physical education credits, therefore there are fewer classes.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited to adult school students in the South Bay area of California and may not represent the experiences of other adult students outside of this area.

### **Assumptions**

It is assumed that U.S. society is concerned about the high rate of high school dropouts and that failing to complete secondary and post-secondary education is viewed as problematic, as suggested by the literature. This research was conducted under the assumption that African Americans and Latinos want to be educated and their educational endeavors will have a positive impact on their lives personally and professionally. The study was also based on the assumption that educational institutions want and need information regarding the retention of students at the adult level.

The accuracy and validity of this study depended on the students' honesty and truthfulness. This researcher assumed the students were interested in the topic and wanted to participate in the study. This researcher also assumed that the conclusions of this research might disclose patterns, categories, and themes that might be cause for additional research, and that administrators and educators would want this information to enhance their understanding of and to assist community adult learners.

## Definition of Terms

*Adult Education.* Formal courses or classes via lectures or correspondence for adults (“Adult education,” n.d., para. 1). Adult learners must be at least 18 years of age and not concurrently enrolled in high school. Adult education also includes formal courses of study for adults continuing their education.

*African American Students.* Students of African-descent whose native country is the United States of America and consider themselves Black or African-American.

*Community Adult School (CAS).* A school for adults who are not otherwise engaged in formal study.

*California Department of Education (CDE).* “The core purpose of the California Department of Education is to lead and support the continuous improvement of student achievement, with a specific focus on closing achievement gaps” (“California Department of Education,” n.d., para. 1).

*California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE).* The purpose of the CAHSEE is to assess whether students who graduate from high school can demonstrate grade level competency in the state content standards for reading, writing, and mathematics (California Department of Education, 2008b).

*General Educational Development (GED).* The GED is a test for adult students who have not completed their high school diploma. The test consists of five different subjects: math, reading, writing, social studies, and science. The fee for the test is currently \$150, and prospective GED takers must be 18 years old. Adult schools offer GED test preparation courses.

*High School Diploma (HSD).* The HSD program for CASs is designed for adults who did not finish high school. The HSD program meets the same state standard graduation requirements established in the regular high school, excluding physical education.

*High School Dropout.* A dropout is one who willingly leaves high school or a student who is not successful in completing school (“Dropout”, n.d.).

*Chicano/Hispanic/Latino Students.* Students of Hispanic descent, especially Latin-American inhabitants of the United States. Hispanic is commonly used in the eastern portion of the United States, whereas Latino is commonly used in the western portion. The term Latino is used for those who have origins from Latin America (Mexico, Central America, South America, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic) including Haiti, and Brazil. Also, the term Latino is inclusive of Afro-Latinos (Latinos with African Blood) and Latinos with indigenous blood, which includes someone from Mexico who is a descendent of the Aztecs or someone from Haiti descended from Caribbean Indians. Although the author recognizes the difference between the terms “Hispanic,” “Latino,” and “Chicano,” for simplicity’s sake, the author will use all three throughout this paper to capture the voices of multiple authors from during different eras.

*Low-Income Students.* An individual whose family’s taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150% of the poverty guideline level amount (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2012). Low income is defined as twice the federal poverty level or \$40,000 for a family of four in 2006.

*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)*. NCLB is the latest federal legislation that enacts the theories of standards-based education reform, which is based on the belief that:

setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education. The act requires states to develop assessments in basic skills to be given to all students in certain grades, if those states are to receive federal funding for schools. (“No Child Left Behind Act,” 2012, para. 2)

*Subgroup*. A group whose members share a common quality.

*2nd Call*. 2nd Call is a community-based organization designed to assist in the personal development of individuals who are at risk youth, ex-felons, parolees, and others similarly situated (2nd Call, n.d.).

### **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 described the background and struggles of African American and Latino students in their quest for a high school diploma; this chapter also included the research questions posed by the author.

Additionally, Chapter 1 provided a conceptual framework that lays a foundation for this study. Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to high school dropouts, minority students, adult education, barriers to success, and high school graduates. Chapter 3 provides information concerning the methodology used in this study. Chapter 4 discusses the results of the study. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the research methodology, results, conclusions, and recommendations for policy/practice and further study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **History of Public Education and Dropout Rates**

It is estimated that between the years of 2007 and 2008, African American and Hispanic students had the highest dropout rates in the nation (Chapman, 2009). Students dropping out of high school or leave school before receiving a diploma is a complex problem. The Common Core of Data defines a dropout as “as a student who was enrolled at anytime during the previous school year who is not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year and who has not completed school” (Stillwell, 2009, p. 1). A student who is not in school due to an illness, has relocated to another school district, is deceased, or is currently living in another country will not be documented as a dropout (Stillwell, 2009).

Nationwide, in 1985, three million seniors received their high school diplomas, but about a million potential graduates did not. The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2012) reported that in 2004 that 10.3% of high school students did not graduate with their class. Among Hispanic students the rate increased to 23.8%. In 2009, 512 million adults people were lacking a high school diploma in California (California Council for Adult Education, 2011). Failure to complete high school is an historic phenomenon that continues to plague American society.

The high school dropout rate in 1900 was 90%. In the 1930's only about one-third of the youth population completed high school. By 1950 the number who graduated had increased to 59%. In the 1970's, the dropout rate continued to decrease, but it was still nearly 28% nationwide. (Grossnickle, 1986, p. 8)

About one hundred years ago, California began to endorse laws permitting public funds to be used to educate students beyond elementary school (Gonzalez, 2007). This

seemingly late recognition of the value of state-sponsored education was likely due to, among other things, the fact that graduating high school was not the social norm during the agriculture and manufacturing era of that time. A high school diploma has now become the minimum requirement for many areas of employment. The Research and Education Association (1997) reported that blue-collar workers who are promoted to supervisor have graduated from high school. According to the CDE, one in four high school students in 2006-2007, or 24.2%, “failed to graduate or move into another program to continue their education” (as cited in Kollars, 2008. P.1). With a dropout rate of more than 22%, Latino students are leaving high school at twice the rate of African-Americans and 3 times that of Whites (Chapman et al., 2010). Many theorists attribute the dropout discrepancies to a language barrier issue for Latino students, whose primary language is often Spanish (Clauss-Ehlers, 2009). Both African American and Hispanic student graduation rate is frequently less than 50% in urban districts (Berliner & Barrat, 2009; De Cos, 2005). The statistics are becoming more problematic for students in California as they complete ninth grade, as less than 75% are completing high school in 4 years. Students are turning to alternative methods to gain additional credits in order to complete high school with their graduating class. Adult education has been able to bridge the graduation gap for many high schools. The students that would once have been labeled high school dropouts are now becoming high school graduates. The CDE ranks by percentage rates the dropouts among ethnic groups in the state of California (Table 1)

Table 1

*California Statewide Dropout Rate by Ethnicity*

Ethnic Group	4-year dropout rate
African American	41.6%
American Indian/Alaska native	31.3%
Asian	10.2%
Filipino	11.9%
Hispanic	30.0%
Pacific Islander	27.9%
White	15.2%
Multiple/no response	30.6%

*Note.* Reprinted from *Annual Report on Dropouts and Graduates Using Individual Student-Level Data, 2008*, by the California Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr08/yr08re194.asp>. Copyright by the author.

Numerous studies have attempted to ascertain the cause of students leaving high school before receiving their diploma, finding that “there is no single reason why students drop out of high school” (Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. 3). Students drop out of high school for a variety of reasons, including feeling disconnected to the educational environment, feeling uninterested, viewing school as boring, struggling to complete work assignments, and dealing with day-to-day personal problems (Berliner & Barrat, 2009; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Fine, 1991a; Grossnickle, 1986; Waggoner, 1991).

Students are dropping out of high school at a disturbing rate, sending educators scrambling to find out why these students are leaving school. De Cos (2005) asserted that students that are less likely to graduate have “major implications for their future economic well-being, as well as that of the state” (p. 3).

The nation’s dropout crisis is in the spotlight more than ever due to the public, educators, and counselors increasing their demands on high schools (Berliner & Barrat, 2009). The Associated Administrators of Los Angeles (2012) assert that adult schools “serve parents and community members in numerous positive ways, thousands of high



school students are provided an opportunity to graduate with their classmates, thanks to their neighborhood adult schools” (p. 6). High school students are being forced out of school after a certain age and sent to adult education schools to complete their high school diplomas.

It should be noted that high school dropouts are disproportionately underemployed, living below the poverty lines, incarcerated, receiving some form of public assistance, and less healthy. They are frequently divorced or separated from their spouse, raising their children in single family household (Pytel, 2006). Thus, the failure of African Americans and Latinos to complete their high school education, at the very least, correlates with a wide range of social and personal pathologies. These data underscore the necessity of clarifying the reasons why some drop out and eventually return to complete their education, emphasizing the importance of this study.

### **History of Adult Education**

Adult education has evolved over the centuries from only educating students in basic literacy skills focusing on higher academics and vocational training. When the first school exclusively for the education of adults was opened in 1811 in Wales, students were taught the fundamentals of reading, beginning with the alphabet. During the 1800s, Europeans did not approve of parents associating with their children in school, or learning in the same classroom. At that time, the illiterate, poor, and even aged adults began to call for instruction (Pole, 1969).

In the United States, during the colonial period, vocational education was essential, although there was little focus on academic instruction; most colonists were chiefly concerned about survival in an agricultural society. According to Knowles (1962),

in 1873, correspondence and agricultural education courses were popular. Over the years adult education centers often alters some of it programs depending on the needs of the community (Jones, 1984). By 1951, the Fund for Adult Education (FAE), which encouraged adult education in politics, humanities and international affairs, was established (Knowles, 1962). The FAE was terminated in 1961, and in 1964 the Economic Opportunity Act Title II, Part B (Public Law 88-452) was launched; this portion of the poverty act provided funds for basic adult education (Knowles, 1970). Adult literacy and poverty concerns grew in the 1960s during President Kennedy's administration. In 1967, Congressman Carl Dewey Perkins of Kentucky introduced the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to the Title III amendment, which provided education centers with matching grants. Under Title II funding, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) of 1982 provided adults with job training programs and was replaced in 1998 by the Workforce Investment program (WIA; National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium, n.d.).

**Adult education nationwide.** As the United States' economy shifted from industrial and agriculture influences to the space age and higher technology, "the goal for adult education was to help people adjust more effectively to the rapidly increasing rate of cultural change" (Knowles, 1970, p. 317). Those who had not completed their high school education required additional assistance adapting to societal and technological changes. According to Knowles (1970), the mission of the adult educator is to meet the following three specific areas of need: "1.) the needs and goals of individuals, 2.) the needs and goals of institutions, and 3.) the needs and goals of society" (p. 22). As society evolves and individuals now compete for jobs on a global level, educators are still faced

with the fact that high school students are not ready for college, let alone able to compete on a global stage.

Adult education has the unique opportunity of providing expanded educational opportunities to local community members. Additionally, the Federal government has recognized the importance of adult education. President Obama has focused on students transitioning from remedial skills to community colleges, and during his inaugural speech he declared, “we will provide the support necessary for you to complete college and meet a new goal; by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world” (The White House: Office of the Press Secretary, 2009. para. 1). It is clear that the leader of this nation is committed to supporting education. This will be integral to California as the adult educational system goes through the process of being rebuilt, repositioned, and redefined (Jones, 2010).

**Adult education in California.** In California, adult education had humble beginnings, originating in San Francisco in 1856, in the basement of St. Mary’s Cathedral. These classes were developed to assist immigrants from Ireland, Italy, and China who immigrated to America in large numbers (California Council for Adult Education, n.d.).

The State Supreme Court has recognized the importance of adult education by passing legislation that allowed for free public education and night school for adults. California’s Division of Adult Education was created in 1927 by the State Department of Education (California Council for Adult Education, n.d.). California has 340 adult schools with a student population of more than 1.2 million (California Adult School fact sheet, n.d.). Of the 1.2 million people who attend adult education schools, “four hundred

sixty four (464) thousand took English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, of that number four hundred three (403) thousand are Hispanic and two hundred twelve (212) thousand are women” (California Council for Adult Education, 2011). Classes are being offered to a diverse group including parents, high school students, older adults, disabled adults, and recent immigrants dealing with the difficulties of adjusting to life in California. The core programs include: ABE, Citizenship, ESL, HSD, GED, CTE, Job Training, Parenting, Older Adults and Adults with Disabilities classes (California Adult School fact sheet, n.d.).

Adult literacy programs provide ABE instruction in basic math, reading and writing. The ABE programs provide services to English language learners, adult students, concurrent high school students who is reading, writing or math skills are below the ninth grade level This program also provides skills for students to complete the HSD program. According to Debra Jones, administrator in the CDE:

For the first time in its history the United States is the only highly developed democracy where the current generation of young adults is less likely to have completed high school than the previous generation. Over 1 million adults drop out of high school each year, and there are currently more than 12 million adults without a high school diploma in the workforce. In California there are more than 6 million adults without a high school diploma and one in every three students does not graduate from high school. (Jones, 2010, p. 3)

Adult educators play a critical role in providing students with the necessary skills not only to succeed, but also to transition from high school into the workforce with a diploma (Jones, 2010).

### **Purpose of Adult Education: Pathway to a High School Diploma**

The California report card provides a layman’s assessment of data for California schools. The 2010 California report card documents that the state spends \$1 billion a year

providing basic education skills to adults who fail to acquire proficiency during K-12 education. Basic skills begin with reading, writing, or comprehending math below ninth grade standard levels. According to Knowles (1970), historically, in the United States, community adult schools' high school diploma programs were designed to assist adult students that dropped out of the traditional high school setting. This added a pathway towards high school completion for African American and Latino students who have traditionally experienced barriers to graduating.

People often wonder what would motivate an adult learner to return to school after being outside the world of academia for so many years. Wodlinger (2007) explains that such questions "lie at the heart of motivation for adults engaging in learning after their formal schooling has been completed or, for whatever reason, discontinued" (p. 33). Wodlinger further concludes, "each adult learner has her/his personal and often very private reasons for returning to school" (p. 33). Not only in the United States but all over the world people return to school for reasons including: (a) to gain new skills and develop other interest, (b) to communicate better, (c) social/recreational reasons, (d) to develop social contacts, (e) to gain specific awards/qualifications, (f) to gain entry to higher level courses/other institutions, (g) employment-related motives, (h) to use skills to generate income or start own businesses, (i) leisure-oriented adult education, (j) to change skills in current employment, (k) to change careers, (l) to use skills for the benefit of charities or voluntary organizations, (m) to pass skills on to others, and (n) to use skills to complement those acquired in other courses (Wodlinger, 2007).

### **Advantages of an Education: Increased Earning Potential and Standard of Living**

In the past, an individual could acquire a middle class income with only a high school diploma (Kirst & Venezia, 2004). Kirst and Venezia (2004) note that in recent years, a high school diploma is still seen as a minimum requirement to acquire high-wage employment. The U.S. Census gathered data to:

illustrate the significant economic returns of more education: in the year 2000, median annual earnings for workers aged twenty-five and over with a high school diploma was \$24,267, compared with \$26,693 for workers with an associate's degree (27 percent higher), and \$40,314 for those with a bachelor's degree (66 percent higher). (U.S. Bureau of the Census, as cited in Kirst & Venezia, 2004, p. 2)

There is a substantial difference “between college and high school graduates that varies over time, college graduates, on average earn more than high school graduates” over the course of their life (Porter, 2002, p. 1). Additional information from the U.S. Census Bureau documents that “over an adult's working life, high school graduates earn an average of \$1.2 million; associate's degree holders earn about \$1.6 million; and bachelor's degree holders earn about \$2.1 million” (Day & Newburger, as cited in Porter, 2002). Over a lifetime these earnings are dramatically dissimilar. On average, a person with a college degree can work one job with a sizeable income, whereas a person who did not obtain a degree may have to work two or three jobs to make a decent living in today's economy. According to Sum et al. (2003), “Those young adults who fail to complete high school are in the most precarious economic position, facing a bleak economic and social future” (p. 2). Earnings over time for students with a diploma increase as adult students advance their education levels (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Median Annual Earnings of All Full-Time, Full-Year Wage and Salary Workers Ages 25-34, By Sex And Educational Attainment: Selected Years, 1980–2006*

Gender	Year	All education levels	High school diploma or GED	Bachelor's degree or higher
Male	1980	\$43,700	\$41,400	\$48,900
	1985	\$41,200	\$37,500	\$51,400
	1990	\$38,600	\$33,900	\$49,000
	1995	\$36,400	\$31,800	\$49,300
	2000	\$39,800	\$33,900	\$53,900
	2005	\$36,100	\$31,000	\$51,600
	2006	\$37,000	\$30,000	\$50,000
Female	1980	\$29,400	\$26,900	\$36,300
	1985	\$30,000	\$26,200	\$39,100
	1990	\$30,500	\$24,700	\$40,100
	1995	\$29,100	\$23,300	\$39,700
	2000	\$31,600	\$24,600	\$41,600
	2005	\$31,000	\$24,800	\$41,300
	2006	\$31,800	\$24,000	\$41,000

*Note.* Reprinted from *The Condition of Education 2008*, 2008, by Planty et al. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2008/section2/indicator20.asp>. Copyright 2008 by the National Center for Education Statistics.

### **Intra-racial Discrimination**

Discrimination is defined as “the treating of some people better than others without any fair or proper reason (“Discrimination,” n.d., para. 1). This section focuses on racial inequality, specifically discrimination against African Americans and Latinos. It is not meant to discount or negate the fact that discrimination has been and is being experienced by other races and groups within the United States. However, the scope of the study this section is limited to a discussion of discrimination among African Americans and Latinos in America.

It is important to note that racial and color-based divisions exist within different minority groups. Intra-racial classification and discrimination are common within the

African American and Latino communities as well as many other ethnic groups. Among African Americans, such division dates back to slavery, and finds its roots in interracial mixing between Black slaves and White slave owners. Historically, Blacks of mixed race could *pass* for White given the lighter hue of their skin; “thousands of mulattos were running away and passing for white” (James, 2003, p. 10). To the present day, skin color has caused a divide and feelings of prejudice against one’s own race. In Spike Lee’s film *School Daze*, he portrays the consciousness of color and class among African Americans in post-secondary education. According to Jones (2002), the film depicts the conflicts between “dark-skinned black women with ‘natural’ and unprocessed hair and light skinned black women with chemically straightened hair or hair extensions” (p. 57). Jones further contends that the film emphasizes the “tension of color and class consciousness” (p. 57. ) among African Americans. According to Govenar (2007), “the light-skinned people had greater opportunities for education, and also you know, some of them could pass [as white] and go to school to be educated” (p. 151). Govenar further argues that lighter-skinned African Americans benefited from a broader range of employment opportunities because although employers were prejudiced, they were but more accepting of people with lighter skin.

Many great African American thinkers of the past were of mixed race heritage; their lighter skin afforded them higher levels of attainment in education. Booker T. Washington, Oscar Micheaux, and Thurgood Marshall are a few examples of this phenomenon. This is an unfair consequence with adverse effects:

So it was not very long before widespread sexual contact between Africans and Europeans, and the rules of hypodescent, combined to create a group of free blacks and slaves and former slaves with very light skin – black people with green eyes and red hair, or blue eyes and light brown skin, or brown eyes and straight



hair. Some of this group, when free, moved to cities, where their light skin and cultural attributes – language, education, skills – made possible the creation of a light-skinned black elite. And because light skin then, as now, was the most important marker of status in this country, many of this group came to use light skin as an independent mark of status. Historians also tell us that dark-skinned blacks who had other attributes of high status – a skill, formal education, wealth – were often excluded from the social life of these elite communities because of their dark skin. (Scales-Trent, 1995, pp. 5-6)

Within Latino communities individuals distinguish themselves by using terms such as “guerro/blanco” for light skin and “moreno/prieto” for dark skin (Clauss-Ehlers, 2009, p. 577). This racial divide dates back to the 1800s before the Texas Revolution, Mexican-America war and the Spanish-American War. After the acquisition of Mexican territories, Mexicans in the United States were segregated and labeled as nonwhite. Latinos were forced to identify themselves with American classification of a lighter skin race and to discriminate against persons of their own ancestry with darker skin (Ruiz & Sanchez Korrol, 2006). Johnson (2003) correlates a higher socioeconomic status with Mexican Americans who have lighter, more European skin, in contrast to Mexicans with darker, more indigenous, or Native American skin color. Furthermore Johnson states:

Mexican Americans who were lighter/more European hue had attained 9.5 mean years of education, while darker/more Indian Mexican Americans had completed only 7.8 years on the average. Investigations of levels of income revealed the same pattern, with light/European [Mexican Americans] earning \$12,721 while the dark/Indian group earned only \$10,480. (p. 266)

Discrimination on all levels has plagued American society and the world for centuries, though many historically oppressed people changed their “reactions, attitudes, feelings” and beliefs to “social policies, motivations” and being labeled (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003, p. 49). According to Bonilla-Silva (2006), “blacks and dark-skinned Latinos are the targets of racial profiling by police” to the extent that there is an

“overrepresentation in the court systems being prosecuted, incarcerated and even executed” (p. 2).

### **Background of African American and Latino Discrimination**

**Latinos.** Hispanics settled in America hundreds of years ago, as early as 1513. The largest increase of Mexican-Americans in America was directly connected to the need for work force particularly building railroads in the 1880s and farming in the 1940s (Marin & Marin, 1991). Aguirre (2005) asserts that the turmoil from the Mexican Revolution led thousands of Mexicans to flee to the United States.

Hispanic families wanted their children to be educated just like many other Americans. In 1945, the Mendez family moved from Santa Ana to Westminster, California. The family purchased 40 acres and was busy cultivating the land. The father knew the children needed to enroll in school and asked his sister to register his children in school at the same time she took her children (Aguirre, 2005). While trying to enroll the children in school the administrator told Mendez’s sister that:

her two children (who were fair skinned and whose last name did not sound Mexican) could be enrolled but that the Mendez children (who were dark skinned and who had a very Mexican sounding last name) would need to attend a school about a mile away for Mexican students. (Aguirre, 2005, p. 323)

This became a historical case consisting of five first generation Mexican-American fathers (Thomas Estrada, William Guzman, Gonzalo Mendez, Frank Palomino, and Lorenzo Ramarez) that confronted the issue of segregation in the United States District Court in Los Angeles on March 2, 1945, along with close to 5,000 other children of Mexican descendants that made reference to their children suffering unlawful discrimination by separating their offspring due to race, color, and heritage, and their being forced to attend separate schools for Mexicans in the Westminster, Santa Ana,

Garden Grove, and El Modena schools located in Orange County, California. A Jewish American civil rights attorney, David Marcus represented the case on behalf of the five fathers (Aguirre, 2005).

On February 18, 1946, the presiding judge ruled in favor of Mendez and the other fathers. Judge McCormick found the segregation of schools to be unconstitutional and did not provide equal protection of rights. The school district appealed the ruling in San Francisco's Ninth Federal District Court but the appeal was denied, stating that it violated the fathers' 14th Amendment rights. The Governor at the time was Earl Warren, who later became Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court and presided over *Brown v. Board of Education*. Aguirre (2005) believes the *Mendez v. Westminster* case "provided a key link in the evolutionary chain of school desegregation cases culminating in *Brown v. Board of Education*" (pp. 321-322).

Though the *Mendez* case was not widely publicized, its legacy paved the way for many discrimination cases in the field of education such as *Brown v. Board of Education*. As a result, "the legal cases that have influenced the status of African Americans historically have come out of the day-to-day struggles of regular people" (Martin, 1998, p. 1). The signs below are from the 1950's and 1960's and are blatant indicators of how African Americans and Latino's were view during this era (Figure 1).



Figure 1. *Discrimination in America.*

**African Americans.** *Brown v. Board of Education* started with an African American gentleman named Oliver Brown who decided to fight for his children to be educated along with several other parents (Patterson, 2001). Their courage cost them dearly in their personal lives. The leader of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) legal defense, Thurgood Marshall, took on the case. Before *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Jim Crow laws enacted legal mandated segregation of the races (Martin, 1998). In the *Brown* case the judges agreed that the African American students' rights were being violated by the Topeka school system. Children of color were not allowed to attend the "White schools" and had to walk much further to "Black" schools due to segregation laws. Though laws had been passed many schools did not integrate until the "Little Rock Nine" started attending Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas (Patterson, 2001).

Seven years after the Mendez case, the *Brown v. Board of Education* verdict in 1954 revolutionized the school systems in America by overturning "the doctrine of separate but equal schools as unconstitutional" and also "put other forms of antiblack discrimination on the road to extinction" (Martin, 1998, p. 1). The Harlem Amsterdam News in 1954 reported, the Supreme Court ruling in favor of Brown was the greatest victory for the Negro since the slaves were freed in 1863. Many authors declared that *Brown v. Board of Education* was the most important Supreme Court case of the last century (Aguirre 2005; Marin & Marin, 1991; Martin, 1998; Patterson, 2001).

## Barriers to Success

Today, the goal of educators is to create schools with high achievers across the nation regardless of race, socio-economic status or societal issues (Johnson, 2002).

Though many educators subscribe to this line of thinking, Cose (1997) contends:

There are many graveyards for intellectual dreams in black and brown America, places where no one needs to read *The Bell Curve* to understand how little is expected of him or her, places where achievement is considered unnatural and discouragement lurks at every turn—often in the guise of sympathetic condescension from educators who, certain that most of their pupils will never be scholars, don't dare to challenge the Fates. (p. 50)

Moreover, most Americans “believe that the achievement gaps among groups are inevitable” (Johnson, 2002, p. 5). According to Sulton (2008), challenges occur when educational institutions “make cosmetic” efforts to avoid inequality and discrimination (p. 23). The effects of discrimination continue to linger in many parts of the world. In the past, people “experienced intense feelings of alienation” and “agreed that there was an US and a THEM, and everyone knew to which group he or she belonged” (Lindsey et al., 2003, p. 49). These feelings of alienation still widely apply today.

As educators grow through training and paraprofessional development, they also need to become culturally proficient. Lindsey et al.'s (2003) definition of cultural proficiency “is a way of being that enables both individuals and organizations to respond effectively to people who differ from them” (p. 5). Lindsey et al. delineate six points along a cultural proficiency continuum:

1. Cultural destructiveness: *See the difference, stomp it out.* The elimination of other people's cultures.
2. Cultural incapacity: *See the difference, make it wrong.* Belief in the superiority of one's culture and behavior that disempowers another's culture.

3. Cultural blindness: *See the difference, act like you don't.* Acting as the cultural differences you see do not matter, or not recognizing that there are differences among and between cultures.
4. Cultural precompetence: *See the difference, respond inadequately.* Awareness of the limitations of one's skills or an organization's practices when interacting with other cultural groups.
5. Cultural competence: *See the difference, understand the difference that difference makes.* Interacting with other cultural groups using the five essential elements of cultural proficiency as the standard for individual behavior and school practices.
6. Cultural proficiency: *See the differences and respond positively and affirmingly.* Esteeming culture, knowing how to learn about individual and organizational culture, and interacting effectively in a variety of cultural environments. (pp. 5-6)

Becoming culturally proficient is a start for educators to make necessary changes in the schools. Other issues currently facing students today in urban and low-income areas are less rigorous curriculum, limited access to technology, low standards or perspectives on education, a lack of qualified teachers, poor curriculum and, educational budget cuts (Johnson, 2003).

### **College Readiness**

There has been an ongoing process among educational authors to study high school seniors who are not prepared or ill prepared for college. Many high school seniors are graduating from high school but are not ready to attend college, especially in the

academic areas of English, math, and science. High school students must complete the nation's two premier college entrance exams known as the SAT and ACT. However, sponsors of these tests say that too many students are leaving the 12th grade ill prepared for the academic rigor they will face in higher education. The sponsors of both tests have used the annual release of scores SAT and ACT to emphasize minority students' lack of scholastic readiness for college or higher education (Cavanaugh, 2003).

Kirst (2001) terms this phenomenon *the senior slump* and points out that this appears to be the rationale of students—some disjunction between the K-12 system and postsecondary systems. This includes a lack of assessment in grade 12, a college admissions calendar that provides little incentive for seniors to take demanding courses, and a lack of coherence and sequencing between the K-12 system and colleges. There is more emphasis on access and admission to college than on preparation for completing college. Kirst further concludes that educational policies should focus on: (a) strengthening the high school curriculum and linking it to the general education requirements of the first year of college, (b) recognizing various achievement levels on statewide K-12 assessments that meet college or university standards, (c) improving college admissions and placement priorities, and (d) assigning responsibilities for K-12 issues to a single entity in each state.

Moro and Mercurio (1988) state that if in-service training were provided for high school instructors, high school seniors would be academically prepared for college. Some “blame poorly trained teachers; others criticize students for taking easy courses” (“Not ready for college,” 2006, p. 10). Usually the complaints focus on math and science, however, only 51% of seniors are ready for the reading demands of college. Some

suggest that only by toughening reading standards will students learn the deeper reading skills needed in college. A recent analysis of students who took the 2005 ACT college admissions test showed disturbing scores in the vocabulary and reading portions of the test. This analysis predicts rising verbal challenges in college coursework (“Not ready for college,” 2006). High schools should not have to take all the blame for this trend, however; colleges and universities like to complain but rarely do anything to ensure that high school students understand college academic standards.

College readiness skills have continued to decline across the nation. According to the ACT (2010), students in North America are not ready for college and their college readiness skills across all races are at a level of crisis. These same students do not have the skills to enter the workforce. In order for the nation’s high school seniors to succeed they will need to acquire rudimentary skills if they plan to attend postsecondary training. Before most of these students enter college, they will require remedial courses. The ACT has documented that students in their first year of postsecondary training are dropping out of school at an alarming rate; “one in four freshmen at 4-year institutions, and one in two freshmen at 2 year institutions fails to return for a sophomore year” (ACT, 2010, p. 10). Though taking the ACT test is optional, in 2010, less than 50% of the students in the nation completed the ACT while still attending high school, and of that number only 66% met English college readiness standards.

### **Emotional and Environmental Impact**

Environmental and emotional influences and experiences may affect a child’s achievement (Quinn, 2009). Parents do not always know the details of their children’s day-to-day activities. School age children and their parents are affected by bullying,



drugs, gangs, and dysfunctional families (Cose, 1997). Many of these factors can contribute to students dropping out of high school. According to Bridgeland et al. (2006):

many students gave personal reasons for leaving school. A third (32 percent) said they had to get a job and make money; 26 percent said they became a parent; and 22 percent said they had to care for a family member. (p. 3)

The emotional and environmental forces impacting academic achievement are affecting the graduation gap in many schools (Johnson, 2002). Kai Ajala Dupe, a mentor of and advocate for African American males, says that he could have fallen victim to the *inferiority complex* he has identified as a recurring problem in the development of young African American males:

I grew up in the so-called ghetto, in a single-parent home. A big part of it for me was building confidence early. My mother conditioned me to believe that I could do anything. These kids are constantly hearing what they can't do. That's a powerful message. (Quinn, 2009, p. 2)

### **Parental Influences and Family Issues**

In the traditional American family, parents will at times advise children to postpone marriage and a career in order to attain educational accomplishments (Chapman, 2009). The family plays a critical role in the lives of children and young adults, and parental influences have been known to shape a child's future (MacLeod, 1987). According to MacLeod (1987), the expectations placed on a child depend on the circumstances of the family and influence the child's future. All parents want their children to be successful in their academic pursuits regardless of class, race, or ethnicity (Hiatt-Michael, 2005). Family issues, personal problems, or life crises often lead high school age students to drop out of or postpone graduating from high school. Family involvement and background have been demonstrated to exert a significant impact on a child's academic growth.

**Resiliency**

Adult students are challenged with many obstacles that would cause most people to give up but they persevere beyond what is expected. These students have a resilient attitude and have the ability to overcome and cope with adversities. This is an essential component for students to survive through overwhelming obstacle (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001). Booker T. Washington (1901) asserted that life is not measured by the position a person has but by overcoming obstacles while trying to succeed. With everyday life challenges as well as technology becoming more complex it is essential for people to have a resilient mindset.

### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

#### **Restatement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions, motivations, and barriers experienced by African American and Latino students returning to school to receive a high school diploma with dreams of attending higher education. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the reasons given by adult school students for returning to adult school to receive a high school diploma?
2. How the reasons, if at all, given by the students are related to their demographic characteristics?
3. How do adult school seniors perceive the value of obtaining a high school diploma and higher education?

The high school dropout rate has increased dramatically in recent years, especially among African-American and Latino students (Berliner & Barrat, 2009). However, minority students have inundated CASs and community colleges at a remarkable rate. These students are now adults who are confronted with having to return to school while working full time jobs, taking care of children, ill or absent parents, and taking a high school exit exam that may not have existed during their original high school years. Nieto (1994) asserts that “discussions about developing strategies to solve educational problems lack the perspectives of one of the very groups they most affect – students, especially those students who are categorized as ‘problems’ and are most oppressed by traditional educational structures and procedures” (p. 392). Countless studies have been conducted about the reasons why students drop out of high school (Berliner & Barrat, 2009;

Bridgeland et al., 2006; Fine, 1991a; Sum et al., 2009). There is a need, however, to identify adult students' thoughts regarding obtaining a high school diploma, higher education, and or a college degree, as few studies have examined adult student perceptions of a high school diploma and aspirations of college access (Nieto, 1994).

### **Research Study Design**

This study used a sequential mixed method design. The quantitative data offer a list of reasons adults cited for returning to school, and a correlational design was used to examine the relationship between the reasons they gave and their demographical characteristics, such as age, gender, race, etc. The qualitative data from the interviews described the students' perceptions regarding the value of a high school diploma and higher education.

**Sequential mixed method.** Using a sequential mixed method allowed the researcher to expand on one method by using another. Creswell (2009a) suggests, "The study may begin with a quantitative method in which a theory or concept is tested, followed by a qualitative method involving detailed exploration with few cases of individuals" (p. 14). New ideas can emerge from one method, causing a need for open-ended questions to be answered. Furthermore, the mixed method design is used to "separate quantitative and qualitative methods as a means to off-set the weaknesses inherent within one method with the strengths of another method" (Creswell, 1998, p. 217). The second phase of qualitative data built upon the quantitative opening first phase data. Creswell (2009b) considers this as the theoretical lens that shapes the direction of the research questions "aimed at exploring a problem...and ends with a call for action"

(p. 212). The researcher was able to gather additional data on adult students' personal experiences using a mixed methods approach.

Triangulation techniques are involved in all mixed method approaches (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori, 1998). Triangulation engages the use of "both qualitative and quantitative methods to study the same phenomena within the same study" (Tashakkori, 1998, p. 18); the qualitative and quantitative differences complement one another.

**Quantitative.** The quantitative research component provided background information about the respondents. Muijs (2004) describes quantitative research as using mathematically-based methods to explain a phenomenon by collecting data and inputting the information in numerical form. These data in turn are analyzed using particular statistics. For this study the researcher chose to use Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a computer software program used for statistical analysis, to analyze the data.

Talburt (2002) suggests that in order to open up new lines of thought, researchers must not think about research only for its veracity. Rather, the researcher should allow respondents the freedom to engage in discussion that opens the possibility of viewing the world in a different way. A quantitative methodology by itself would not be sufficient to guarantee a meaningful in-depth study.

**Qualitative.** A qualitative research methodology was also employed in this study to examine the individual or group life experiences of adult students seeking a high school diploma. According to Heppner and Heppner (2004), qualitative research is a thought-provoking journey in which the researcher pays close attention to other people's stories, retells the stories in the way that he/she understands them, and or reconstructs the

story with the participants. The participants explain what their experiences mean to them and how these same lived experiences affected them.

Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants” in a natural setting (p. 15). At some point in the research the researcher must have “face-to-face interaction over time” (Creswell, 2013, p. 45). In-depth interviews, a common method in a qualitative study, include “open-response questions to obtain data on participant meaning – how individuals conceive of their world and how they explain or make sense of the important events of their life” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 350). Patton (2002) noted that qualitative evaluation is appropriate for data collection that is in-depth and includes written documents and open-ended interviews. Table 3 presents an overview of different characteristics of qualitative research.

Table 3

*Characteristics of Qualitative Research*

Characteristics	LeCompte & Schensul (1999)	Marshall & Rossman (2006)	Hatch (2002)
Natural setting (field focused), a source of data for close interaction	Yes	Yes	Yes
Researcher as key instrument of data collection			Yes
Multiple data sources in words or images	Yes	Yes	
Analysis of data inductively, recursively, interactively	Yes	Yes	Yes
Focus on participants’ perspectives, their meanings, their subjective views	Yes		

*(table continues)*

Characteristics	LeCompte & Schensul (1999)	Marshall & Rossman (2006)	Hatch (2002)
Framing of human behavior and belief within a social-political/historical context or through a cultural lens	Yes		
Emergent rather than tightly prefigured design		Yes	Yes
Fundamentally interpretive inquiry – researcher reflects on his/her role, the role of the reader, and the role of the participants in shaping the study		Yes	
Holistic view of social phenomena		Yes	Yes

*Note.* Reprinted from *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (2nd ed., p. 38), by J. W. Creswell, 2007, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Copyright 2007 by Sage.

Creswell (1998) reached a conclusion that qualitative research should be explored when there is a need in a specific subject area. Creswell further states that exploration is unpredictable and “cannot be easily identified, theories are not available to explain behavior of participants or their population of study” (p. 17). According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), qualitative research is descriptive and allows the researcher to identify and understand participants’ feelings and emotions. This approach was selected for the current study to gather a wealth of data that explains the feelings, emotions, thoughts, and perceptions of the value of obtaining a high school diploma, college degree, vocational certification, or higher education. Through these data the researcher was able to identify themes, patterns, and categories of the students’ perceptions. Creswell introduces qualitative methodology by embracing five different research traditions known as biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study.

### **Participants**

This research sought to gather data from a group of volunteer adult learners from the Inglewood Community Adult School and the 2nd Call intervention program in the

South Bay region of Southern California. The adult school was selected based on the researcher's former involvement in the school over 6 years. This adult educational facility has a day and evening adult high school diploma program. By law, the day students must meet the minimum age requirement of 18 to attend classes (CDE, 2005). These adult learners can also attend classes in the evening with students that are concurrently enrolled in high school during the day. The students either lack credits to graduate with their class or are making up poor grades to elevate their grade point average (GPA) for college entrance. 2nd Call (n.d.) "believes by enlarging the scope of individuals' lives and working a coordinated strategy with education, employment, housing, health insurance, and substance abuse counseling, we will save lives which now seem lost" (para. 1). This organization was chosen based on its population of adult students in the Inglewood area attending an adult education facility.

In this mixed methodology study, the researcher studied African American and Latino students' motivation, perspectives, and barriers regarding returning to adult school to receive a high school diploma. The participants were at least 18 years old, in an adult high school diploma program, and either African American or Latino. The researcher chose to study only the two subgroups due to the high percentages of African Americans (47%) and Latinos/Hispanics (46%) attending the school. The school has a smaller percentage of Whites (4%), Asians (1%), and American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islanders and other racial groups (3%) that were not included in this study (Inglewood Community Adult School, 2005).

**Quantitative.** The Inglewood Community Adult School had a population of 7,703 students during the last Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)



assessment in 2005. Only 1,653 students at the school are enrolled in high school subjects, out of that number 300 are adult students (Inglewood Community Adult School, 2005). The researcher planned to recruit approximately 110 currently enrolled day and evening students for the quantitative portion of the study. The determination of an adequate sample size for the regression models was calculated using a formula by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001), who recommend that the sample size be calculated based on the following formula:  $\text{Sample Size} = 104 + m$  (p. 117). In this study,  $m$  equals the number of independent variables. Given that formula, the researcher estimated a sample size between 110 and 115 adult diploma students. The 2nd call organization has over 100 participants, although not all of the students in the program attend adult schools. The researcher planned to survey roughly 30 students attending evening adult school classes to secure the 110 participants needed for this study.

Data collection occurred in complete confidence, maintaining the highest ethical standards. The adult students did not write their name on any survey or interview paperwork. The students were assigned code numbers. Names were only known to the researcher and kept confidential. Assigned coded numbers were used to identify the six students to be interviewed based on their aspirations of attending higher education. The students were de-identified and data were aggregated by age, relationship status, ethnicity, and gender.

**Qualitative.** After the student participants completed the quantitative portion of the study, six students were selected and recruited to be interviewed. These students were selected based on the survey answers of appearing to be motivated and highly focused on attending higher education. Though more than six students fit in this category, these six

student answers stood out, showing clear determination beyond adverse circumstances to attend higher education. The interviewees were all adults from Inglewood Community Adult School and 2nd call, consisting of two male and one female African American students, and one male and two female Latino students. All students had been in the program from 1-1.5 years. These respondents expanded upon their perceptions of the importance of a diploma and degree in in-depth interview, which inquired about their perceptions of the value of obtaining a high school diploma, higher education, vocational education, or a college degree.

The face-to-face interviews were given to one student at a time on different days and at different times to avoid students seeing each other entering or leaving the classroom. Each interviewee was informed that there were no unforeseen risks to participating in the study, but if at any point during the interview if information is disclosed relating to child abuse, elder abuse, or any other mental or physical abuse, the researcher would be obligated to break confidentiality and report to the necessary authority.

### **Instrumentation and Materials**

The researcher designed three instruments to gather data for this mixed methodology study: Adult Student Survey/Questionnaire Demographics (Appendix A), Adult Student Motivations Survey Questionnaire (Appendix B) and an interview protocol for adult students (Appendix C). There were no pre-existing instruments to establish the motivations, perceptions, and barriers of adult high school diploma students. Therefore, it was necessary to develop new surveys in order to gather data. The survey assessed reasons why adults returned to school after dropping out of traditional high school.

Content validity was based on survey items gathered from the literature review (Appendix D) and an expert panel (Appendix P) of adult education teachers in an adult diploma program. These educators had been teaching in an adult diploma program ranging from 5 years to over 30 years of experience. The researcher's committee chairperson approved of the panel of experts to gain their professional opinions of the adult student motivations for returning to school. Based on personal experience, the researcher developed a first draft of both the demographic and motivation surveys. Next, the expert panel was asked to give a list of reasons adult students returned to school to obtain a high school diploma.

**Quantitative.** The quantitative portion of the survey was based on the adult student Survey/Questionnaire Demographics (Appendix A) and the Adult Student Motivation Survey Questionnaire (Appendix B). The primary investigator developed the two surveys and the one interview protocol that corresponds with the three research questions (See Table 4).

Table 4

*Research Question Matrix*

Research Questions	Data gathering tool	Method of Analysis
1. What are the reasons given by adult school students for returning to adult school to receive a high school diploma?	Motivation survey	Descriptive Statistics (Frequencies and Percentages)
2. Are the reasons given by the students related to their demographic characteristics?	Demographic questionnaire	Pearson Correlations
3. How do adult school seniors perceive the value of obtaining a high school diploma to further their future educational or vocational goals?	Interview	Qualitative Analysis of Themes, Patterns and Categories

**Qualitative.** As previously mentioned, the researcher selected 6 students to participate in interviews based on information gathered during the survey (Appendix E). The questions explored reasons for leaving high school, future goals, and perceptions regarding receiving a diploma.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

**Protection of human subjects.** This study's consideration for the protection of human subjects was in accordance with Pepperdine's University's guidelines. The population of students was African American and Latinos in the high school diploma program. All subjects were adult students 18 years of age and older. The study remained within the regulations established by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Education and Psychology. This study also complied with the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, DHHS (CFR), Title 45 Part 46 (45 CFR 46), titled Protection of Human subjects, and Parts 160 and 16 (Pepperdine University).

The researcher submitted an application detailing all research procedures used in this study and also obtained permission from the district (Appendices F & G) and 2nd Call (Appendix H) to conduct this study. The adult students participated on a completely voluntary basis. The research was limited to CAS students currently in the HSD program. The subjects had the option to complete both the surveys. The researcher avoided discussing any information that could be potentially damaging, thus posing minimal risk to the adult students. Students were informed that although the study conferred no unforeseen risk, if at any point during the interview if information was disclosed relating to child abuse, elder abuse, or any other mental or physical abuse, the researcher would be obligated to break confidentiality and report to the necessary authority. Moreover,

upon the completion of the surveys and interviews, all transcripts and surveys not published as a part of this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a secure location for 5 years after the completion of the study. The interviews were audio recorded and after the researcher transcribed the interviews into a Word document and analyzed all data, the tapes were placed in a locked file cabinet; all audio recordings will be destroyed in 5 years. All interviews, surveys, and audio-recorded documents were copied to one USB drive and one CD-ROM in order to back up and store all information gathered by the researcher. The researcher will store the USB drive and CD-ROM in a locked file cabinet for at least 5 years. At that time, the USB will be destroyed. At the end of 5 years, all items used in the study will be destroyed.

The students' participation was not influenced by the researcher and there were no incentives given. The researcher has no employment ties to the organizations. Therefore, students were neither obligated to complete surveys nor to be a part of the interview protocol.

**Collection procedures.** The researcher received approval from both the Inglewood Unified School District (IUSD) and 2nd Call (Appendices F & H). Furthermore, a panel of experts validated the survey instrument and interview protocol (Appendix I). Upon authorization of Pepperdine University's IRB, the researcher took the following actions:

1. The researcher notified IUSD and 2nd Call of the designated days and times requested for the students to complete the surveys and the interview protocol.
2. The researcher planned assemblies for adult diploma students (day and evening).

3. The researcher identified and recruited target group of 110 African American and Latino adult diploma students attending the community adult school with assistance of adult school teachers.
4. The researcher administered the surveys at the Inglewood Community Adult School and the 2nd Call organization.
5. Teachers or staff gathered target group for the assemblies with the assistance of the office staff.
6. The researcher conducted assemblies for adult students using preplanned script (Appendix J).
7. The researcher acquired consent of 110 adult students and conduct both Survey/Questionnaire Demographics (Appendix A) and Motivation Survey Questionnaire (Appendix B) using a pencil and paper method.
8. After completing the surveys, there were two boxes in the front of the room, one to place the consent form in and the other for the completed surveys.
9. The researcher collected survey results and identified six African American and Latino students that marked on survey having future dreams for attending higher education.
10. The selected group volunteered and was included in the interview portion of the study. Again, there were more than six students who could fit in this category, these six student answers stood out showing a clear determination beyond physical circumstances were determined to attend higher education.
11. The researcher acquired consent (Appendix K) and conducted six face-to-face interviews (Appendix C).

12. The researcher collected and evaluated findings from the interviews.
13. The researcher analyzed data for themes, patterns, and categories.
14. The findings from the surveys and interviews served as the basis for the conclusions and recommendation.

**Quantitative.** The point of contact for the adult school was director Sherryl Carter, and for 2nd Call was CEO and Founder Skip Townsend. The researcher recruited the target group by contacting the teachers or counselors at the adult school after the IRB process was approved. Four adult school high school diploma teachers were a part of the expert panel and were informed of the nature of the study (Appendix I) at that time. The teachers set up an assembly for the researcher to request the students' participation (Appendix J).

Two opinion surveys were administered at the Community Adult School in Spring 2012 to the Inglewood Community Adult School students in the high school diploma program. The participants of 2nd Call were enrolled in an evening adult school, but completed the surveys at a mandatory meeting for all 2nd Call members. Responses were collected from all students aged 18 and older willing to complete the opinion survey and participate in this study. Only currently enrolled community adult school students participated in this study.

When delivering the questionnaire, the researcher informed the students of the research topic and its importance to the field of CAS education (Appendix J). The first page of the survey was the Informed Consent (Appendix L), which the students signed. The survey was developed by an expert panel of HSD adult school teachers, community activists, and educators that have interaction with adult diploma students. The

respondents completed both surveys using the paper and pencil method. The students put the surveys into a box upon completing the surveys, and placed their consent form in an adjacent box. The information from the surveys was input manually in the SPSS software for analysis of the data. The data were analyzed and coded by external coders.

**Qualitative.** An interview protocol (Appendix C) was constructed requesting the participants to expound on their perceptions of the value of obtaining a high school diploma. The interview protocol consisted of the eight following questions:

1. Please explain why you left high school.
2. Please share why you wanted to receive your high school diploma.
3. What are your perceptions of receiving a high school diploma and how do you think you will benefit from obtaining your diploma?
4. Please describe your future educational and or vocational goals.
5. Who supported you the most while trying to obtain your diploma?
6. What strategies do you believe the schools could adopt to help students stay in school?
7. Please identify potential barriers that have prevented African American and Latino students from higher education after receiving a high school diploma.
8. Is there any additional information you would like to share about your experience concerning your high school diploma and higher education?

The qualitative interviews, in addition to the quantitative surveys, provided further information beyond the statistical data (Creswell, 1998). The primary investigator met with all six prospective interviewee's first (morning, evening, and 2nd Call locations) to read over and review the adult students consent form. All students understood the



terms of agreement and signed the form. Then the interviewee's were involved in a one-on-one, face-to-face interview with the researcher. The researcher made sure that each person returned to their classroom before getting the next student to ensure anonymity. The six adult learners all planned to further their education through community college, 4-year university, vocational school, or gain a degree via military G.I bill.

The interviews were 20-30 minutes in length. The interview protocol included only relevant questions to this study, and the interviewees were asked to clarify any answers that were ambiguous. All interviews were audio recorded and the researcher transcribed the interviews into a Word document at a later time. The examiner then examined the transcripts for common themes and patterns.

### **Validity**

The interview protocol and survey instruments were validated by the following panel of experts: Immanuel Fears, adult school English teacher; Steward Oatman, adult school Social Studies teacher; Michelle Nicoles, adult school English teacher, Syd Mutani, adult school Math teacher and Thelma Allen, adult school Reading and CAHSEE teacher. The researcher met the panel of experts to ask for their participation in order to validate this study. The panel of experts also reviewed the documents and were asked to make modifications to the survey instruments.

### **Analysis of Data**

For this study the researcher chose to use SPSS to analyze the data. SPSS is a computer software program used for statistical analysis. Written questionnaires were analyzed by using descriptive statistics, which included standard deviations, means and percentages.

All adult student interviews were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document and reviewed by each coder (Doug Neufield, Valerie Little and James Sulton). The researcher identified key topics and asked the coders to look for and uncover relevant themes, patterns, and categories.

### **Limitations of Study**

The survey instrument is new and was developed by the researcher. Although this survey was reviewed and revised by a panel of experts, there could have been unexpected problems with the administration of the paper and pencil survey questionnaire and the data analysis of the outcomes.

### **Summary**

The researcher examined African American and Latino adult students' motivations, perceptions, and barriers related to obtaining a high school diploma. A sequential mixed methods approach was used, involving surveys and in-depth interviews. The researcher set out to provide information and suggestions for adult school administrators striving to close the graduation gap among these subgroups.

## **Chapter 4: Data Collection and Analysis**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to discover the motivation behind adult students returning to school to obtain their high school diploma. It also identified reasons why these students wanted to attend college or higher education. Responses from 93 participants were used for this study.

The study focused on CAS students' perceptions regarding specific factors having contributed to their returning to school for achievement and growth. This information is important for school counselors, teachers, educators, and administrators striving to close the graduation gap among student subgroups, retain high school dropouts, and keep students in school until they receive a diploma. This chapter presents the results of the data collected from: (a) a demographic survey/questionnaire of adult school students (Appendix A), (b) an adult student motivation survey questionnaire (Appendix B), and (c) six one-on-one interviews consisting of eight interview questions (Appendix C).

This chapter presents the results of data collection and the analysis of the data received, generating answers to the three research questions posed by the researcher. The researcher received permission from the superintendent of IUSD, the Director of Adult and Career Technical Education of Inglewood Community Adult School and the Founder/CEO of 2nd Call. The first section presents the outcomes of the demographics and the students' motivation survey that was distributed to 110 adult students at the Adult School and the 2nd Call organization during the week of March 12, 2012. The data were collected during three assemblies: two held at the adult school (one during the morning classes and the other in the evening with the night students), and one at 2nd Call. The

second section summarizes the demographic and students' motivation survey outcomes from the 110 adult student participants. The last section concludes with the findings of the six one-on-one adult student interviews.

All of the adult students from both sites completed the informed consent form for participating in the adult student motivation survey and demographics questionnaire.

Once the adult students completed the consent forms, the primary investigator distributed both surveys to a population of 110 adult school students at both sites. Students who were not enrolled as seniors but stayed to participate were later identified and their surveys were eliminated from this study, leaving 93 participants. The surveys were distributed the week of March 12, 2012 at the Inglewood Community Adult School and the 2nd Call organization. Once the respondents were surveyed, six students were recruited for face-to-face interviews based on their desire to attend college or higher education. All of the surveys and interviews were collected during a 2-week period from March 12, 2012 through March 26, 2012 at the Inglewood Community Adult School and the 2nd Call organization.

### **Analysis of Demographic and Student Motivation Data**

**Frequency counts for selected variables.** Table 5 displays the frequency counts for selected variables. There were more women (55.9%) than men (44.1%) in the sample. The most common relationship statuses were married (20.4%), single (45.2%) and "in a relationship" (21.5%). The most common racial/ethnic backgrounds were African-American (59.1%) and Latino/Hispanic (43.0%). The primary home language was English (76.3%), and participants' first language was most commonly also English (68.8%). Of those who answered, most (15.1%) reported having an Individualized

Education Program (IEP) in high school. Less than 10% of the sample reported having any type of diagnosed learning disability. The researcher did not see documentation of the diagnosed learning disabilities but the students reported having an IEP in school. Almost all (97.8%) were currently in the 12th grade. Most (69.9%) respondents reported that they were “very likely” to continue onto college.

Table 5

*Frequency Counts for Selected Variables (N = 93)*

Variable	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Female	52	55.9
	Male	41	44.1
Relationship status	Single	42	45.2
	Married	19	20.4
	Divorced	2	2.2
	In a relationship	20	21.5
	It's complicated	8	8.6
	Other	2	2.2
Race/Ethnicity <sup>a</sup>	African American	55	59.1
	Caucasian	2	2.2
	Asian	1	1.1
	Latino/Hispanic	40	43.0
	Native American	2	2.2
	Other	6	6.5
Primary Home Language <sup>a</sup>	English	71	76.3
	Spanish	28	30.1
	Other	2	2.2
First Language <sup>a</sup>	English	64	68.8
	Spanish	26	28.0
	Other	3	3.2

<sup>a</sup> Multiple responses were allowed

(table continues)

Variable	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Had IEP in high school	No	68	73.1
	Yes	14	15.1
	Did not answer	11	11.8
Learning Disabilities <sup>a</sup>	Dyslexia	6	6.5
	ADD	2	2.2
	ADHD	4	4.3
	Other	5	5.4
Current grade level	11	1	1.1
	12	91	97.8
	13	1	1.1
How likely to continue onto college	Not likely	5	5.4
	Somewhat likely	13	14.0
	Very likely	65	69.9
	Did not answer	10	10.8

<sup>a</sup> Multiple responses were allowed

**Descriptive statistics for selected variables.** Table 6 displays the descriptive statistics for selected variables. Ages of participants ranged from 18 to 56 years old ( $M = 26.45$ ,  $SD = 10.27$ ). Fifty-seven percent did not work ( $M = 11.90$ ,  $SD = 16.78$ ) and 49.5% did not have children ( $M = 0.95$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ).

**Reasons for dropping out of high school sorted by highest frequency.** Table 7 displays the frequency counts for participants' reasons for dropping out of high school. The most commonly given reasons were "poor academic performance" (18.3%), "family issues" (17.2%), and "bored" (11.8%). Common "other" reasons were "a few credits short," "did not drop out," and "turned 18 years old and the high school sent me to adult school."

Table 6

*Descriptive Statistics for Selected Variables*

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Low	High
Age	93	26.45	10.27	18.00	56.00
Number in house	93	4.01	1.58	1.00	9.00
Hours worked in week <sup>a</sup>	93	11.90	16.78	0.00	50.00
Number of children <sup>b</sup>	93	0.95	1.28	0.00	6.00
Age at dropping out	71	16.89	1.71	9.00	19.00
Last grade completed	80	10.45	0.88	6.00	12.00
Current GPA	25	1.92	1.33	0.00	3.50
Reading level entering school	26	6.56	4.49	0.00	12.00

<sup>a</sup> Zero hours of weekly work (*n* = 53, 57.0%)<sup>b</sup> Zero children (*n* = 46, 49.5%)

Table 7

*Reasons for Dropping Out of High School Sorted by Highest Frequency (N = 93)*

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Poor academic performance	17	18.3
Family issues	16	17.2
Bored	11	11.8
Pregnancy	10	10.8
Employment	7	7.5
Discipline issues	5	5.4
Gangs	5	5.4
Drugs	3	3.2
High school was not for me	3	3.2
Illness	1	1.1
Other	30	32.3

**Research Question One**

Research Question One asked, “What are the reasons given by adult school students for returning to adult school to receive a high school diploma?” To answer this question, Table 8 displays the frequency counts for the reasons given. Of the 19 options given to the respondents, the top five endorsed answers were “to earn a high school

diploma” (80.6%), “would like to be a role model for younger siblings/children” (55.9%), “did not take high school seriously” (54.8%), “higher paying job” (52.7%), and “need a diploma to gain employment” (51.6%).

Table 8

*Frequency Counts for Reasons Given for Returning to Adult School Sorted by Highest Frequency (N = 100)*

Reason	<i>n</i>	%
To earn a high school diploma	75	80.6
Would like to be a role model for younger siblings/children	52	55.9
Did not take high school seriously at the time but later in life realized a High School Diploma is necessary	51	54.8
Higher paying job	49	52.7
Need a diploma to gain employment	48	51.6
Must have a High School Diploma to enter college	47	50.5
To boost confidence and self-esteem	42	45.2
Tired of being poor/broke	34	36.6
To advance to a higher position within the company	21	22.6
Other employment-related motives (Salary increase)	19	20.4
Parents/family demanded I return to school	18	19.4
Recovered from an illness, death of a loved one or family crisis	9	9.7
Kids are grown up/older, can return to school	8	8.6
Athletics (Scholarship consideration, College admission requirement)	5	5.4
Requirement for Statutory or Regulatory funding (GAIN/CalWORKs/TANF/GR/GROW/SSI)	5	5.4
Laid off work	3	3.2
To satisfy parole or probation requirements	3	3.2
Parenting obligation (program will only pay for child care if attending school, i.e. Crystal Stairs, etc.)	1	1.1
Sent by the courts	0	0.0

## Research Question Two

Research Question Two asked, “Are the reasons given by the students related to their demographic characteristics?” To answer this question, Spearman rank-ordered correlations were used to correlate the 40 demographic variables with the eight most



common reasons (endorsed by at least one third of the participants). Spearman correlations were used instead of the more common Pearson product-moment correlations because of the frequent non-normally distributed data in the sample.

Cohen (1988) suggested some guidelines for interpreting the strength of linear correlations. He suggested that a weak correlation typically had an absolute value of  $r = .10$  (about 1% of the variance explained), a moderate correlation typically had an absolute value of  $r = .30$  (about 9% of the variance explained) and a strong correlation typically had an absolute value of  $r = .50$  (about 25% of the variance explained). Given 320 correlations (top eight reasons correlated with 40 demographic variables), a researcher would expect 16 correlations (5% of the total correlations) to be statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) simply due to random fluctuations in the data (Tashakkori, 1998). Therefore, for the sake of parsimony, this section will primarily highlight those correlations that were of at least moderate strength to minimize the potential of numerous Type I errors stemming from interpreting and drawing conclusions based on potentially spurious correlations.

For the reason “to earn a high school diploma,” 8 of 40 correlations were significant at the  $p < .05$  level, with three of the correlations being of at least “moderate” strength using the Cohen (1988) criteria. Specifically, earning a diploma was more important for younger participants ( $r_s = -.57, p < .001$ ), those with fewer children ( $r_s = -.36, p < .001$ ), and those with higher reading levels when they entered school ( $r_s = .51, p < .01$ ).

For the reason “would like to be a role model for younger siblings/children,” 3 of 40 correlations were significant at the  $p < .05$  level, with one of the correlations being of

at least “moderate” strength using the Cohen (1988) criteria. Specifically, being a role model was more important for those with higher reading levels when they entered school ( $r_s = .46, p < .05$ ).

For the reason “did not take high school seriously,” 3 of 40 correlations were significant at the  $p < .05$  level, with none of the correlations being of at least “moderate” strength using the Cohen (1988) criteria.

For the reason “higher paying job,” 5 of 40 correlations were significant at the  $p < .05$  level, with none of the correlations being of at least “moderate” strength using the Cohen (1988) criteria.

For the reason “need a diploma to gain employment,” 1 of 40 correlations was significant at the  $p < .05$  level, with one correlation being of “moderate” strength using the Cohen (1988) criteria. Specifically, those with employment motivations gave more importance when they worked fewer hours per week ( $r_s = -.31, p < .005$ ).

For the reason “need a diploma to enter college,” 1 of 40 correlations was significant at the  $p < .05$  level, with none of the correlations being of at least “moderate” strength using the Cohen (1988) criteria.

For the reason “boost confidence and self-esteem,” 0 of 40 correlations was significant at the  $p < .05$  level, with none of the correlations being of at least “moderate” strength using the Cohen (1988) criteria.

For the reason “tired of being poor/broke,” 6 of 40 correlations were significant at the  $p < .05$  level, with none of the correlations being of at least “moderate” strength using the Cohen (1988) criteria.

### Research Question Three

Research Question Three asked, “How do adult school seniors perceive the value of obtaining a high school diploma, higher education, vocational certification, or a college degree?” To answer this question, the researcher selected 6 participants based on their survey answers of having dreams of attending college, vocational goal or higher education.

**Purpose of the one on one interviews with adult school students.** The researcher met with six adult students individually based on their answers to the demographic and motivation surveys on their desire to attend college or higher education (Appendices A & B). The researcher had to acquire written permission to include their thoughts and perceptions in the study. Each student completed a consent form before interviews were conducted. The purpose of the one-on-one interview was to acquire additional information regarding reasons the students left high school, reasons they returned to high school to receive a diploma, and their future educational or vocational goals. Table 9 presents the gender and ethnicity of the interview participants.

Table 9

*Breakdown of Interviewees by Ethnicity and Gender (N = 6)*

Ethnicity	Female	Male
African American	1	2
Latino	2	1

The researcher asked the 6 participants eight interview questions that were designed to address research question three. The interview questions were as follows:

1. Please explain why you left high school.
2. Please share why you wanted to receive your high school diploma.

3. What are your perceptions of receiving a high school diploma and how do you think you will benefit from obtaining your diploma?
4. Please describe your future educational and or vocational goals.
5. Who supported you the most while trying to obtain your diploma?
6. What strategies do you believe the schools could adopt to help students stay in school?
7. Please identify potential barriers that have prevented African American and Latino students from higher education after receiving a high school diploma.
8. Is there any additional information you would like to share about your experience concerning your high school diploma and higher education?

During the interviews additional questions were asked to clarify and complete participants' responses. All interviews were audio recorded, then transcribed into a Word document and analyzed. After careful analysis of the data, the researcher and coders uncovered seven themes.

**External coders.** Three coders were selected by the primary investigator and were separately given data to code. The goal for the three coders was to discover similarities from the data. The coders were given the transcribed interview questions and answers. Next, they were asked to uncover relevant themes, patterns, and categories. Participants' names were changed in order to keep their anonymity throughout this process. The researcher had revealed four categories and themes throughout the data. With the assistance of the coders, the four sections were broken into more detailed headings that captured each topic's essence.

All three coders received their doctorates from Pepperdine University in Education with an emphasis on Leadership, Administration, and Policy and had implemented the coding procedure previously while examining the data for their dissertations. The researcher had previously assisted all three coders with the coding of their data during their dissertation process and in turn they assisted with this researcher's coding. Two of the coders were familiar with and had previously worked in other high school diploma programs.

**Findings.** The 20-30 minute one-on-one interview conference permitted the adult student participants to reflect and expand on their on their reasons for dropping out of high school, their motivations for returning to adult school, and current and potential obstacles and barriers regarding pursuing their educational goals. The in-depth interview provides data that allows individuals to share and make sense of their life experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). During the data collecting process in depth interviews are critical, and it is recommended that the interviews be audio recorded. This allows the researcher to become a better listener, focusing on the conversation and not the writing or spelling of words (Creswell, 1998). The researcher and coders uncovered the following seven themes:

1. Academically Adrift
2. Emotional Impact
3. Employment
4. Environmental Influences
5. Family and Community Support
6. Family Issues

## 7. School Culture and Climate

All quotes in the following sections discussing each of the seven themes were given by student participants.

*Academically adrift.* This first theme suggests that students did not take high school seriously at the time and either dropped out or turned 18, at which time the high school checked them out and sent them to adult school. Some students simply drift through high school, unaware of the educational A-G requirements required for college access. These students were lacking sufficient credits to graduate with their class. When participants were asked to explain why they left high school, one student stated:

Well, I really didn't leave high school. I actually finished. Well I didn't finish. I don't have a high school diploma. It's just I basically follow around the wrong people. I didn't listen to what my family members was telling me. I didn't take it to heart. I was just being me, just doing what I wanted to do, and not care. I would say the main reason why I did what I did in high school pertaining my high school diploma was follow behind the wrong people. Technically, me, I was a follower and I wanted to do what they doin, I don't wanna go to class, I skipped class and it's just if I would've known what I know now then I would probably have my high school diploma. I don't really consider it as me leaving high school. I just wasn't able to graduate. So it wasn't, like, my choice to either leave or come back. So I didn't graduate, so I had to leave. (Student #2)

Based on this student's answer, the researcher asked a clarifying question that would explain what year the student dropped out of high school and how many credits were needed to graduate. The student further explained:

Well, like I said I didn't really drop out- I went through the whole process up to 12th grade— I just didn't meet the requirements to get my high school diploma so---I was just a few credits short in high school. The adult school counselor here did tell me how many credits I needed but I forgot. (Student #2)

Another student shared a similar response, stating:

I don't really consider it as me leaving high school. I just wasn't able to graduate. So it wasn't, like, my choice to either leave or come back. So I didn't graduate,

so I had to leave. No, I didn't have enough credits to graduate. No, actually I just didn't finish my 12th grade year. I just need a couple of credits here. (Student #3)

Many students acknowledged college counselors were on campus and provided students with information concerning college requirements, SAT scores, and college fairs. Information was distributed through fliers, announcements throughout the school, assemblies, and even field trips to colleges. Four of the six students stated that they do not remember receiving information from the college counselor. One student shared the following experience with the researcher:

I guess the counselors came to talk to us, like, I remember going to a college fair but I just walked around with my friends. At times it was hard to concentrate on the lessons or someone coming to talk to the class. I was in my own world, one day I remember wondering if I was pregnant and panicking, like, not focused on school work...what would my parents say. Would they put me out and my boyfriend wasn't supportive at the time. I couldn't focus on school, like, after a while I just stop coming and had my baby. (Student #4)

Many students explained that although they were attending school, they lacked interest or were lazy, they did not take school seriously, they became pregnant, their parents forced them to attend, or they were simply tired of coming to school. Here are some students' responses in their own words:

- I left high school because I wasn't doing good. I got pregnant at 16 so I left the ending of my freshman year (Student #4)
- I left high school because I was interested in, more interested in, Like, my dancing career and I move to Brazil with my dad. And that's when I tried to, like, major in Samba and ballroom dancing (Student #1).
- And I was just, like, I wasn't focused in school. I was just about having fun. I was all about my Drama class, like, the spring- What was it? Spring musicals and the fall productions and all that stuff; so that's- I was all interested in the Arts. I wasn't really that focus in school (Student #1).
- I can't even say it's hard. What stopped me is just I feel that I was addicted to laziness (Student #3).

- Addicted to laziness. But they say, you know, not all black people are lazy, not all Latinos are lazy. If you continue doing one thing its gonna become a routine and then mess you up. When I went to saying surroundings, it's, like, it's a routine. When you see your surroundings it's a routine. You don't see no way out. That's what it is. I know I probably mixed it up and it sounds crazy, but--(Student #3).
- I stopped attending school for a year, about a year, which lack of attendance, of course, would mean lack of academics, because with you not being there you won't be able to perform your work. So when I went back, I spoke to a counselor and they told me how far back I was and advised me to go to a continuation school first. Then from the first continuation school I been to all the way to here that's my journey of trying (Student #5)
- Attendance. I would come to school when I felt like it. Yeah. I kinda gave up on it. I was, like, I'm kinda tired of school. Kinda, like, forget it (Student #5).
- I didn't really like it at the time. I had other things to do, like, go with friends. It was more interesting than going to school and spending 8 hours in school (Student #6).

**Emotional impact.** Environmental and emotional influences and experiences may affect a child's academic achievement (Quinn, 2009). All of the interviewees reported that they felt emotional strain related to caring for family members, feeling helpless, and a sense of hopelessness. Furthermore, students want to become productive citizens and role models, but lacked the guidance to do so. Students shared the following statements:

- I want her to be proud of me, and look up to me; so that's why I'm trying to join the Army. Well, for one, I wanna take care of my sister. She's 13 and I want her to, like, I want her to be proud of me, and look up to me; so that's why I'm trying to join the Army. So she can see, you know, like, all our family, like, from my dad side, they're all, like, graduates. There all doctors. There all, like, in good careers. And my mom's side there like, they never graduated. There's not one that graduated (Student #1).
- They feel like there's no way out. That's what it is. They feel like there's no way out. It's like they don't have any more faith. Its like we don't have any goals, any morals (Student #3).
- I don't know what to do. You know like me after I get this diploma it's like now what. Now what am I supposed to do. You have this stuff that everybody tells you you should do and this and that but it's actually hard its hard my mom's even say you have to take a test just to get out of high school



now whereas you just had to get your credits and be there now you have to take a test to get out of high school and that test for me I don't like taking test (Student #3).

- It's like you seem like you're trapped. When you feel like your trapped, it's like I have nothing to lose. And then that's when you have, not so much gang bangers, you have imma do whatever I gotta do to survive (Student #3).
- Once, again, better myself, better my life, better my chances as a young adult to help me future-wise (Student #5).

**Employment.** Four out of six students reported that they were seeking employment and were unable to acquire a “good paying job.” Students explained that they wanted the responsibility of working to help their families. Adult school students often have the complex task of working full-time jobs and taking care of their children and other relatives, but for some students obtaining employment is not an easy task.

According to several students:

- I'm trying to get a job right now. I know my uncle- I know my aunt and her fiancé' are trying to help me out, but I wanna get a job so I can, like, help my sister too. So there'll be enough money so she'll be, like, whatever she wants I'll be able to get her and stuff (Student #1).
- Because I don't have enough money to go to school, I need to find a job (Student #3).
- Because, like, think of it, like, I grew up with a poor family as well, and It's frustrating looking for a job and you don't even wanna go to school. I mean you do wanna go to school. You're just annoyed all these things in your head. You're thinking about “my God, I need to support my sister and my mom, I can't look for a job.” It's frustrating, I don't understand. The work, it's frustrating. My teacher's kicking me out. I'm not gonna come back to school. That's why it's frustrating. That's where I understand people, like, I try to put myself in other peoples shoes cause I grew up with a poor family. So that's why I understand (Student #1)

An additional student added:

Most of the time it's the need that you gotta work, My family is a big family and I have to work. It's either you work or go to school or try to do both. Sometimes doing both throws you off. Its best to either go to school or work. And a lot of

people choose work. Trying to go to work and school is really hard right now. Trying to go to work, school, sleep, eat...it's a heavy day. It would be hard trying to go to college, unless, If you could get a scholarship and not work at the same time. It all comes together in the fact that you need money. So you have to get a job some way. That's what I think stop people from going to college (Student #6).

One student explained why she returned to adult school to receive a high school diploma:

For one; work. Without it, you can't even get a good paying job without it. And two; just know that I would've completed something by myself without people telling me. I wanted to complete it. "oh, yeah, this is for [student's name], this is for [student's name], I completed it for myself." It's a personal goal. And then for my daughter. (Student #2)

Another student added that although she engaged in extra-curricular activities, she had to make a decision that would delay staying in high school:

This is something I been striving since I got out of high school and I really couldn't do it cause my mom runs her own business, and she needs the help so I have to work. She's 58 and she can't move around like she use to. So, it was, I had to stop going to school, I was doing it at first, but I had to stop to help her because she needed help. It couldn't be both me and my sisters going to school, and she didn't have no help. So, I took the bigger hand so my sister was claiming. I took the bigger hand and say so well Imma put my dreams to the side to help her (Student #2)

Additional students added:

- Just to have that confidence behind me (a diploma). If I was going to look for a job, it would just give me confidence knowing that I will be able to get it knowing that I would have my diploma behind me because I know most jobs don't accept anybody that don't have they high school diploma now (Student 3).
- I actually would like to go into business for myself. I know imma probably have to work for somebody else first, but the type of person I am I like to do something on the side (Student #3).
- Cause, I feel like I need it to get a good job because I have a kid I have to support on my own. So it's, like, that's what's making me get my high school diploma. I wanted myself just to, like, have a good job. I won't have to struggle later on (Student #4).
- It will help me, like, resume' people are not just hiring just by your high school diploma now. It's really hard to get a job without it. It need it. It's,

like, something imma need. It's also for school. It also looks good on a resume(Student #4).

- When you apply for jobs they ask for some kind of education. I want to be able to show them that I have some kind of studies. That I could complete something (Student #6).

***Environmental influences.*** Emotional and environmental forces on academic achievement are affecting the graduation gap in many schools (Johnson, 2002). All six students agreed that their surroundings had an impact not only on their education but also on their lives. Students explained:

- Like people have different ways to look at reality. Like around here its gangs and drugs. And if it gets into the school, that's not good. And I would rather be with my friends where it's safe. Then to be in the school alone and not protected or not feeling safe. All of my friends were outside of school doing their own thing and I would be inside. I don't feel safe around here, you know (Student #6).
- It's just I basically follow around the wrong people. I didn't listen to what my family members was telling me. I didn't take it to heart. I was just being me, just doing what I wanted to do, and not care (Student #2).
- Well, what I think. Everyone has their own background. You know how people, like, you said about people, about guys in gangs? They don't put themselves in their shoes. Like, for them, where from where I was raised in the Reseda de Favila En Rio. Gangs were for, like, being strong it's not just being trouble maker. It's just who they are, and the people misinterpret that. You know what I mean? (Student #1).
- Yeah, there's a lot of my friends- they want to do, they have great ideas. They have so much potential to do so much. They just don't have the money. They don't have the support. For them it's, like, too much, it's like getting out of their way. For them it's: I need to work, I need money (Student 6).
- I would say either drugs or just gave up. After high school, that was just it. They say "okay I'm done, don't need to go no further, I'm satisfied where I am" (Student # 2).
- Their surroundings, I think everybody knows this: when you see fast money and then you're sitting here and you're doing everything by the book, you're doing it right, but you see this person might stand on the corner for five minutes and end up making about five hundred dollars. You know what I'm saying? That type of surrounding will hinder you from doing what you are

suppose to do. That's what I'm trying to explain. If you're not where I'm from then you can't really understand. All you can do is watch movies and probably read a book, but unless you walked in my shoes you really can't understand where I'm coming from. That's why I say surroundings is, like, many of things around here that distract people and stop people. That's it (Student #3).

- It's also a lot of people, so-called friends and so-called family members that will pull you down. So you have to watch everybody. It's not just the people outside the home. It's in the family- within the family. Not sayin' so much mom and dad but in the family (Student #3).
- Well, it's really hard. I guess now most people, especially now that everything's changing, the economy, everything, government, their changing everything. Everybody think everybody needs their high school diploma. That's our last option. It's gonna be harder. Especially for the young parents out there that have their kids before high school they need support (Student #4).
- People should take school serious. Reach high. If I wasn't here at this school, I don't know where I would be (Student #5).
- Okay. Yes. You was speaking on goals. I just wanna help out my people. Not just my people but people of different races. That's it. I don't know how to explain it. I see how people of my color be giving up. How you was speaking on earlier how a lot of more Latino's are graduating from high school because I was in high school about three, two years ago and I'm mature from then and I can tell that my people we gave up. We honestly just gave up. I could see it in my peer's faces. I could see it not in my parents faces but I could see It's just like we don't see any hope anymore, and I see where Latino's it's like they took okay we need our education to move on anything that you throw at em' they take it and then move on. With black people we'll just take it and stay down and that's another thing that's why I say I wanna help my people I don't know where at. I don't wanna be in education, but I want to help my people (Student #3).
- I think money is a barrier. Not all people have it. It's, like, a lot of people are on their own. They can't pay for everything. Like, it's financially. It's too expensive. I guess schools are very expensive. They want a lot of money and they're cutting off a lot of stuff; so it's, like, really hard now (Student #4)
- There's a lot of people out here that don't even have anything; so for them to have money for their books it's expensive, like, a hundred dollars a book. Or it's, like, expensive. We barely get money for ourselves to even spoil ourselves a little bit. Everything basically goes on, like, utilities, rent, food. It's hard to have a little extra cash for the books. That's what stops a lot of people (Student #4).

- Yeah. It's like I don't envy em'. I do want what they have, but it's just I want to obtain that. I just want to have it (Student #3).

One student explained that he felt left behind:

When I started to see that my friends were moving along and having a good time in college. That's when I realized I needed a high school diploma. A lot of people were being negative towards me, like, you're just another statistic. You dropped out, you're just another Latino failure. (Student #6)

***Family and community support.*** The family plays a critical role in the lives of children and young adults (MacLeod, 1987). Indeed, all parents want their children to be successful in their academic endeavors regardless of class, race, or ethnicity (Hiatt-Michael, 2005). According to the interviewees, their family members were supportive for the most part. Students shared similar experiences:

- I'd say after I had my daughter, that's what really, really set it off. Then when my fiancé came in the picture and he had his (diploma) I'm, like, oh no. I'm not gon' be the only one without it. So, I'm, like, okay I need to put myself in my own little box to focus on my dreams (Student #2).
- My daughter and my fiancé. They jump on everybody that says I'm not doing what I'm supposed to do. They have my back to the fullest especially my daughter. When she hear somebody say "her mama ain't doin well," she say, "no, no, no my mommy doing well (Student #2)."
- My parents were there. They've always given me the opportunity to go to school and not worry about getting a job because they knew it was gonna be hard for me, school and a job and taking care of a little girl; so it's, like--To support me? They let me go to school. They never let me worry about a job. They let me go to school full, like, they told me not to worry about everything. I was just to go to school and to finish. They take care of the baby (Student #4).
- It was actually me that decided to- I've been seeing this little building for a minute. Let me go in here and ask some questions. And I went in there, and from going in there asking some questions- from that day, that brought me here to how successful I've been since I been here. I was just really random. I just. I don't wanna say I got an epiphany, but back to me just thinking, you know, I'm getting older. Education is important...I thought I really need to, you know, get my high school diploma. I need to get it together. You know they have GED, CAHSEE classes. So, like, I said, you know this could be my

last option, I tried all these other schools, let me try here. From going in there I asked “so specifically what kind of programs do you guys have? And they told me and I got-- It sounded legit. And it sounded like something I would do (Student #5).

- Better, further my future. I realized that without it, I don’t know exactly how successful I’ll be with my life. Like, I felt, like, it was really a necessity. Whether it was for a job or, you know, I wanna go to college. I’m not gonna be able to do that without- you know, your high school diploma, that’s, like, the start of your foundation. So kinda just had to buckle down and say “this really a important factor” and I look at the history with my family and my mother kids, her four kids. Well, she have two that finished, but I wanna be another one of her children that she can be proud of and, you know, another accomplishment. I probably have to say between me and my mom (Student #5).
- My mom and dad. They were always pushing me, they never gave up on me. They would just tell me, you know, you should be going to school. You’re so much better than just staying at the house and just getting into trouble. You’re better than that. It helped out a lot (Student #6).

According to an especially self-motivated student,

I wouldn’t say support. I had people that was rooting me on, but you in there by yourself. Honestly so nobody. They want me to do better but it’s like, when I say that people give up. I don’t wanna say that my parent’s gave up on me. I know they love me, but nobody. Yeah, nobody it’s just myself and sometimes it’s kind of hard trying to motivate yourself when you sit around and look at your situation every day. (Student #3)

***Family issues.*** Family issues, personal problems, or life crises often precipitate

high school students to drop out or postpone their graduating high school. The

interviewees offered the following detailed accounts of their family experiences:

- Hopefully yeah. So that’s why I want her to be- She’s very artistic, and she wants to be- and she’s tall and skinny and crazy with curly hair and she want’s to be a model, and I told her, well, you can do that. Just be focused and cool cause when I was, like, young I was all- my mom supported me in my dancing, and she was, like, yeah you can do whatever you want. But, she really didn’t, like, tell me for school then you can, you know, your dancing and all that stuff (Student# 1).
- Well, at first, it was my dad--in Brazil, and then that’s when he got violent then that’s when they came here. So from here, who opened their arm’s was my aunt and her fiancé. Yeah, my aunt’s 27 and I live with her. Yeah, she’s

young. So she's the one that says, "yeah, don't worry, you're going to live with us cause we're gonna support you." I don't have a job right now. I'm looking for a part-time job. Yeah, they really support me. All my aunts- I have, like, seven aunts. All of them, well, some more than others, like, more, like, not all my aunts only some of them still feel, like, I should go back to my dad or go to my mom. My mom lives in Mexico with my sister, and I'm trying to get my sister here cause I don't think it's a good environment where she lives (Student #1).

- They want me to do better but it's like, when I say that people give up. I don't wanna say that my parents gave up on me. I know they love me, but nobody... (Student #3).
- I left high school because I wasn't doing good. I got pregnant at 16 so I left the ending of my freshman year (Student #4).

***School culture and climate.*** All students noticed a disconnect between the students and school staff at the high school level. They all mentioned having multiple life issues happening at the same time, but no one to listen to them when they were in high school. When the students were asked, "What do you think the school could do to help students stay in school? Could the school do anything?" students responded:

- Well, just be more supportive, and try to understand instead of getting frustrated and kicking kids out of class. Cause that's what I've seen. And they just, like, they automatically see, oh he's a gang member by the way he dresses. They never know he doesn't have money to eat for the day. He acts a certain way because he's been through a lot because his mom or his dad, they didn't teach him well. So, I think teachers should know: be more flexible instead of being very stubborn, and no, I don't like him, get out, get him out of my class (Student #1).
- Try to relate to your students. Not so being a friend to the student. I wish I had somebody to talk to cause a lot times I don't have anyone to talk to so talk to your students. They need somebody actually to speak to because you might have your parents, but my parents they never been divorced, they never, they God fearing parents. I have those type of parents but then when I wanna talk to them about... they seem like they embarrassed to talk to me about some stuff. Some students actually come to school with a lot on their heart and a lot on their mind. They have no one to talk to (Student #3).
- So, if they had more counselors, if the teachers had more training on how to help the students on where they could go to (Student #2).

- Technically, it's really up to the students cause the schools, to me, the schools are doing what they supposed to be doin'. It's really up to the students to strive what they need to do and get it done (Student #2).
- I think everybody has different backgrounds and I think people, like, teachers should get to know their students, and, like, get them motivated. Just talk to them. Get them motivated to do something, like, that's what they need. They need somebody to hear them all, like, individuals, and they'll listen (Student 3).
- If anything I would say maybe try to build a stronger, like, counseling a strong staff and team to really, like, you know...I thought it was smart how they decided to make each student pay each semester when you register a fee. And I said that was kinda smart because that made your students come cause to them it's, like, you know, I paid so I may as well come to school now and not waste my money (Student 5)

**Future goals.** All of the participants expressed having future goals, but not all had strategies to accomplish their goals. The interviewees shared the following personal goals and plans for the future:

- Well, as of right now, I'm just trying to join the Air force. That's what I'm trying to do, but the future goals? I'm not so sure. My plan is just join the Air Force. That's just what I'm trying to do. But from there on, I'm just not sure. I told the recruiter I was interested in medicine. He told me there was a field for that but first try to focus on your high school diploma and then we'll start looking into careers (Student #1).
- Well, my future education after I get done with this is going into nursing. After I get my LVN, Imma go back to school to become a pediatrician because I love- since I been helping her, I love working with kids. I love kids with a passion. That's my heart. I love kids (Student #2)
- I plan on continuing to go to school. I plan on probably going to a Junior College and see how much further I can go. That's it (Student #3).
- I plan to after, like, I get this high school diploma, I plan to go, like, to a community college. I guess, and study for it little by little. Like, first start with, like, CNA and then go up to RN (Student #4).
- I've been getting a lot of advice from a lot of teachers and counselors here. I heard about Freemont Occupational Institution. It's like downtown. I'm not sure exactly what it is I wanna do, but I know I'm gonna get there (Student #5).



- After I graduate, I want to go to community college. I haven't decided what I want to study or career or anything like that. I will figure it out from there (Student #6).

### **Summary of Findings**

This study was conducted to find answers to Research Questions One, Two, and Three. The collection methods in this section include: interviews of six adult students and surveys of 110 adult students using a demographic survey and a reasons/motivation survey. The surveys were used to supply information for Research Questions One and Two. The interviews provided answers for Research Question Three. The students identified reasons for dropping out of high school and shared their motivations for returning to adult school to complete their high school diploma. The adult students' reflective answers identified key reasons and motivations that would encourage students to complete their education. However, students shared that they were not highly motivated to stay in school with their original graduating class. Students reported that they had no idea how hard life would be without completing high school. These findings were clearly stated during the one-on-one interviews.

To answer Research Question One, the data obtained from the demographic survey questionnaire were analyzed using frequency counts and descriptive statistical methods. Results related to Research Question Two used the Spearman rank-ordered correlation to correlate the 40 demographic variables with the eight most common reasons given by students. To report data from the one-on-one, open-ended interviews, the researcher transcribed the data, identifying themes common throughout all interviews. Finally, coders were utilized to discover themes, patterns, and categories in the transcribed data in an effort to avoid biased opinions from the primary investigator.

The literature review generated key ideas related to educational barriers for African American and Latino students during the educational attainment process, including the following: socio-economic status, emotional and environmental influences, family issues, racial discrimination, and personal problems (Cose, 1997; Hiatt-Michael, 2005; Lindsey et al., 2003; MacLeod, 1987). Many potential graduates are prevented from returning to school due to environmental forces (Johnson, 2002) and the cost of education (Kirst, 2001). These categories were used to develop the interview protocol and surveys for the African American and Latino adult students.

**Research question one.** This research question asked, What are the reasons given by adult school students for returning to adult school to receive a high school diploma? This question focused on key motivations for adult students returning to school to receive a diploma. Of the students surveyed, 55.9% stated that they “would like to be a role model for younger siblings/children.” However, during the interviews, students spoke to a lack of role models in their neighborhoods while growing up. Of the students surveyed, 54.8% stated that they “did not take high school seriously at the time but later in life realized a High School Diploma was necessary.” Additional reasons identified by the motivation survey included 49 (52.7%) students desiring a higher paying job, 48 (51.6%) students needing a diploma to obtaining employment, and 42 (45.2%) participants who believed completing high school and receiving a diploma would boost their self-esteem. Finally, survey participants gave the following reasons for returning to school: tired of being broke, wanted to advance to a higher positions within the company, salary increases at work, being laid off from work, requirement for child care or statutory funding, and that their families demanded that they return to school. Furthermore, nine

students stated they had recovered from an illness or the death of a loved one before they could return to school and focus on their studies.

**Research question two.** Research Question Two asked, Are the reasons given by the students related to their demographic characteristics? This question focused on the demographics of the school, learning disabilities, and if the students were interested in attending college. The students completing the surveys ranged from 18 to 56 years of age. The surveys found that 52 (55.9%) of the students were female, 55 (59%) were African American, 40 (43.0%) were Latino, and the remaining 11 students marked “other.” Several students of Jamaican descent or from Africa do not consider themselves African American, marking “other” and wrote out their ethnicity specifically. Students were able to mark more than one option for this section if they were of mixed descent. The primary language used in the home was English (76.3 %), totaling 71 participants, whereas 28 students (30.1%) spoke Spanish as their primary language. Forty percent of the students marked both English and Spanish, meaning they are bilingual and grew up speaking both languages. Forty-two (45.2) of the students were single and 19 (20.4%) were married.

Students shared about having an IEP while in high school. These students were in special education classes while attending traditional high school. Many special education students do not alert the adult schools of their learning disabilities or of their IEP file. Therefore, the adult education programs cannot provide students with the support needed to assist a student with special needs. Students are able to receive special education services until they are 22 years old, and some adult schools have special service centers on site to accommodate students with special needs.

The most common answers to the question “Reasons for dropping out of high school” were poor academic performance (18.3%) and family issues (17.2%). “Other” responses included “did not drop out of high school,” and “when I turned 18 the high school sent me to the adult school.”

**Research question three.** This research question asked, How do adult school seniors perceive the value of obtaining a high school diploma, higher education, vocational programs, or a college degree? This question focused on adult students’ perceptions and value of a high school diploma and higher education. The one-on-one in-depth interviews uncovered seven themes related to students’ reasons for leaving high school: academically adrift, emotional impact, employment, environmental influence, family and community support, family issues, and school culture and climate. Many of the interviewees believed they did not drop out of high school, but the high school told them they had to leave and they were sent to the adult school. The interviews revealed that although the students had previously left high school, they were now focused on completing school to receive a diploma. The students wanted their families to be proud of them and wished to be known as role models to others. Students also found it difficult to find employment without a diploma. In addition, environmental influences had sidetracked many of the students, but the interviews demonstrated that motivated adult students can succeed against the odds. Student responses indicate that family support has had a major impact on many of their attempts to further their education, but some students reported having to motivate themselves. Finally, students noticed a disconnect between students and some of their teachers at the high school level. Students felt teachers should try to get to know them as people. Five of the six students stated that they

would like to have had more counselors or someone at the high school level to whom they could have talked, noting that this would have made a difference in their educational endeavors. An analysis of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations is offered in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 5: Findings, Analysis, and Recommendations**

### **Overview**

This chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the research findings and conclusions. The chapter includes the review of the problem statement, purpose of the problem, and the research methodologies, and also provides recommendations for further research.

### **Restatement of the Problem**

The high school dropout rate has increased dramatically in recent years, especially among African-American and Latino students (Berliner & Barrat, 2009). These students have inundated CASs and community colleges at a remarkable rate. These students, now adults, are confronted with issues of having to return to school while working full time jobs, taking care of children, caring for ill or absent parents, and taking a high school exit exam that may not have existed during their tenure in high school. Countless studies have been conducted about the reasons students drop out of high school, but few studies have examined adult student perceptions, motivations, barriers, and attitudes regarding obtaining a high school diploma and or a higher education or other future educational goals (Berliner & Barrat, 2009; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Fine, 1991a; Sum et al., 2009).

Nieto (1994) asserts that “discussions about developing strategies to solve educational problems lack the perspectives of one of the very groups they most affect – students, especially those students who are categorized as ‘problems’ and are most oppressed by traditional educational structures and procedures” (p. 392). To date, little data has been gathered regarding adult school students’ perceptions of a high school diploma (Nieto, 1994). The Inglewood Community Adult School Population is 49%

African American and 49% Latino, the two subgroups that the researcher wished to explore in this study. Because adult schools allow the dropout to make up credits needed to graduate, they help the district to close the graduation gap, allowing more students to graduate from high school. This research specifically related to adult students re-enrolling in adult school to make up credits to complete their high school graduation requirements. This study is innovative and will hopefully assist adult school administrators striving to close the graduation gap among adult student subgroups.

### **Statement of Purpose**

It is well documented that many African American and Latino students drop out of high school before their original graduation date (Berliner & Barrat, 2009). However, studies that seek to define adult student perceptions of a high school diploma are lacking (Nieto, 1994). Research indicates that the topic of student dropout is an ongoing problem (Grossnickle, 1986; Titone, 1982; Waggoner, 1991). The purpose of this study was to discover the perceptions, motivations, and barriers related to students returning to school to obtain their high school diploma. It also sought to identify reasons why these students wish to attend college or higher education.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

This study used a sequential mixed method design. The quantitative data offered a list of reasons participants shared for returning to school, and a correlational design was used to examine the relationship between the reasons they gave and their demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, race, etc. The qualitative data from the interviews identified the students' perceptions of the value of a high school diploma and higher education.

### **Summary and Analysis of Findings for Research Question One**

Research Question One asked, What are the reasons given by adult school students for returning to adult school to receive a high school diploma? The data collection used to answer Research Question One consisted of a review of the literature, and a motivation survey of 19 possible reasons for students returning to school developed by an expert panel of four adult education teachers and the primary investigator. The expert panel added five additional questions to the motivation survey. The literature review documented the following motivations for the adult learner returning to school: tired of being broke, wanting a higher paying job, and motives related to salary increases (Kirst, 2001; Porter, 2002). However, Wodlinger (2007), offered different, social/recreational reasons for adults returning to school, such as: gaining new skills and developing other interests, leisure-oriented adult education, and using skills for the benefit of charities or voluntary organizations. One possible explanation for the differences is that most research pertained to adult learners in GED programs or vocational training, or students returning to community colleges or universities, not to adult students in a high school diploma program. The panel of experts identified the following motivations for the adult students enrolling in adult education: earning a high school diploma, boosting confidence and self-esteem, needing a diploma to gain employment (Berliner & Barrat, 2009), wanting to be a role model for younger siblings/children (Porter, 2002) and parents/family demanded students return to school. The following four findings from the study that related to Research Question One surfaced from the motivation surveys:



1. Adult students felt left behind while their friends were going to college and working,
2. Adult students wanted to join the military,
3. Adult students regretted not taking high school seriously,
4. Adult students reported that they never dropped out of school but at age 18 and short a few credits, the high schools sent them to the adult school.

The results of the motivation survey indicated that 75 (80.6%) adult students returned to earn a high school diploma, 51 (54.8%) did not take high school seriously at the time, and 52 (55.9%) wanted to be a role model for others. Participants also reported that they returned to school to overcome educational obstacles and move on to other goals in life.

Motivations identified by fewer students included “parent/family demanded I return to school” and “kids are grown up/older, can return to school.” Adult students admitted to attending school with /being in the same classroom as their children, or that they would graduate high school along with their children. Other students reported recovering from an illness, death of a loved one or a family crisis (Berliner & Barrat, 2009), and having difficulty overcoming the death of a parent or child and being unable to focus on school work at the time.

### **Summary and Analysis of Findings for Research Question Two**

Research Question Two asked, Are the reasons given by the students related to their demographic characteristics? Data collection techniques used to answer Research Question Two included an adult student survey questionnaire/demographics with 18 questions. This survey/questionnaire also asked students about reasons for dropping out

of school, learning disabilities, reading level, and GPA information. This allowed the researcher to decode students' reasons for leaving school before inquiring their reasons for returning to school. The findings related to Research Question Two aligned with the literature review indicating "there is no single reason why students drop out of high school" (Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. 3). Moreover, the top reasons students dropped out of high school included poor academic performance, family issues, and feeling bored. These findings are similar to the literature review, which found the following reasons: feelings of being disconnected to the educational environment, feeling uninterested, viewing school as boring, struggling to complete work assignments, and dealing with day-to-day personal problems (Berliner & Barrat, 2009; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Fine, 1991a; Grossnickle, 1986; Waggoner, 1991). Pytel (2006), however, came to a different conclusion when stating that high school dropouts are divorced or separated from their spouses. The findings indicate that two (2.2%) students were divorced from their spouses and eight (8.6%) students answered "it's complicated." The majority of the students were single (45.2%), in a relationship (21.1%), and married (20.4%). Only two students (2.2) marked "other" for relationship status.

The findings further indicate that there were more women (52%) than men (41%) returning to receive a high school diploma. Also the primary language in the students' home was English (76.3%). The researcher also found that because the students were able to mark multiple answers, a significant number (76.3) of the students indicated that they were bilingual both in the home and as a primary language. There were also students of mixed races that checked more than one answer. The most common racial background were 55 African Americans (59.1%) and 40 Latino/Hispanic (43.0%).

### **Summary and Analysis of Findings for Research Question Three**

Research Question Three asked, How do adult school seniors perceive the value of obtaining a high school diploma, higher education, vocational programs, or a college degree? The data gathering methods for Research Question Three included a review of the literature, and six student interviews that consisted of the following eight questions:

1. Please explain why you left high school.
2. Please share why you wanted to receive your high school diploma.
3. What are your perceptions of receiving a high school diploma and how do you think you will benefit from obtaining your diploma?
4. Please describe your future educational and or vocational goals.
5. Who supported you the most while trying to obtain your diploma?
6. What strategies do you believe the schools could adopt to help students stay in school?
7. Please identify potential barriers that have prevented African American and Latino students from higher education after receiving a high school diploma.
8. Is there any additional information you would like to share about your experience concerning your high school diploma and higher education.

The literature indicates a lack of information regarding students' perceptions of a high school diploma and college access, which is in agreement with the researcher's findings (Nieto, 1994). The literature was also consistent concerning the following barriers faced by African American and Latino students: stereotyping, environmental issues, financial problems, being the first in the family to graduate, ill prepared for academic rigor, and emotional influences (Berliner & Barrat, 2009; Porter, 2002).

Students also stated their ethnicity exposed them to environmental issues that members of other races might not experience.

No literature discussed students that were short on credits for graduation having to leave high school at the age of 18. Many students in this study were sent to adult school to make up additional courses. The researcher believes this is new information that has not been formally documented or published.

The interviews uncovered seven themes that were considered most important:

1. Academically Adrift
2. Emotional Impact
3. Employment
4. Environmental Influences
5. Family and Community Support
6. Family Issues
7. School Culture and Climate

During the surveys 69.9% of the students reported that they were very likely to attend college but most were not sure of where they wanted to attend or how they would pay for school. Though several knew the name of the school they desired to attend, half had never spoken with a counselor at the desired location. Undocumented students were not familiar with AB540, which is a way some undocumented students can achieve a college education.

It can be concluded that there is a need to expose students to weekly or monthly college access materials such as A-G requirements, Free Application for Federal Aid (FAFSA), and how to research scholarship information on the adult education campus.

## **Summary of Key Findings**

Frequent themes that repeated throughout the surveys and interviews with adult students included:

1. Students did not drop out of school; the high school sent them to the adult school,
2. Students did not take high school seriously at the time and regret not graduating,
3. Students wanted to be role models for siblings or to make their parents proud,
4. Students felt trapped by environmental influences and did not have mentors or counselors to guide them,
5. Students did not feel secure on the high school campuses and desired a more mature security staff,
6. Students wanted or had to help family,
7. Students perceived the military as a means to leave their current environment and attend higher education,
8. A high school diploma was a necessary foundation to be successful and would lead to accomplishing other goals.

## **Conclusions**

This primary investigator identified a need for more research related to adult education issues in the area of students being transitioned into adult education from high school. Much of the literature review was associated with high school students. The researcher found that all surveys and interviews from the adult students were relevant and will add to documentation for adult education in the future. The adult students perceived

themselves as continuing students, not high school dropouts. They also saw themselves as being role models in the future.

All students discussed emotional and environmental impact having an affect on their academic achievement during the interviews. Drugs and gangs were also identified as obstacles in various studies from the literature review (Cose, 1997; Johnson, 2002). A student admitted to feeling unsafe on campus and stated that he preferred to stay with his friends outside of the school walls because it gave him a sense of protection. It is critical that schools become aware of issues that students are facing and provide students with protection. It may also be helpful to improve verbal communication between students and school staff.

It can be concluded that results of this research, in conjunction with the literature review, point to adult students having multiple concerns of family issues, environmental and emotional influences, and lack of job opportunities. In spite of this, adult students continue to be resilient (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

**Recommendation one.** It is policy practice to support students in the adult school setting, it would be beneficial to include college access days at least once a month. This would enable students to better understand the requirements of the higher education process. College access days should consist of students becoming familiar with the A-G requirements, and trips to and brochures from local community colleges, Career Technical Education (CTE) centers, occupational centers, and the Southern California Regional Occupational Center. The Inglewood Community Adult School has its own CTE center located at the main campus. Providing students with information concerning

college and higher education would enable students to have a plan upon graduating from the adult school. College access days could include a career day as a means of reaching out to the community and exploring career options.

**Recommendation two.** This study revealed that many students did not drop out of high school, but that the high schools sent them to adult school. There should be documentation in adult education journals regarding students being transitioned to the adult schools for credit recovery. The documentation in the high schools could be a flyer or transition slip notifying students that are delinquent of credits and are not eligible to graduate with their class but have options of graduating through adult education. This has the potential to decrease the dropout rate among high school students and increases the graduation rate. Unfortunately, the researcher was not able to locate any formal information on this topic.

### **Policy Recommendations**

The findings of this research indicate that students were being transitioned to the adult school for credit recovery. The students did not understand this process and felt they were being forced out of high school. The primary investigators located a pilot program that addresses this issue at the Wilson Lincoln Community Adult School, which uses a collaboration model to address the topic of drop out recovery and credit recovery. The principal of the Wilson Lincoln Community Adult School, Dr. Carbino, and his leadership team developed a collaboration model that consists of five recovery pathways:

1. Drop Out Recovery

- a. Grade 12 students that are 18 and will be short credits for graduation
- b. Enroll in adult school on 18th birthday

- c. Can offer two pathways toward diploma depending upon credit count
- 2. Credit Recovery: Students need to remediate failed courses
- 3. Strategic Intervention: Students that have not passed CAHSEE or reading below ninth grade level will enroll in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) Program
- 4. Post Secondary Access: Retake classes to better GPA for college eligibility
- 5. CTE Pathway Support: Adult schools provide instructors for CTE courses

The adult school principal and administration can mentor adult school staff and high school counselors in an effort to implement a training program to address the drop out and credit recovery issues within many high schools. Adult schools and high schools will benefit from working together to close the graduation gap.

## **Conclusion**

More than 60 years have passed since *Mendez v. Westminster* and over 50 years since *Brown v. Board of Education*, yet African Americans and Latinos are experiencing barriers to achieving educational goals. This study attempted to identify key motivations, perceptions and barriers experienced by African American and Latino adult students when returning to the pursuit of a high school diploma and higher education through the vehicle of adult education. These students have inundated CASs and community colleges at a remarkable rate. These students are now adults confronted with the challenge of having to return to school while taking care of children, working full and part-time jobs, caring for ill relatives, and taking a high school exit exam that may not have been in existence during their original high school tenure.



This study utilized a sequential mixed method approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative measures. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), qualitative research is descriptive, and permits the researcher to identify and understand the subjects' life struggles. This study investigated the multifaceted phenomenon of a group or individual's unique experiences in striving to complete the high school diploma program in the South Bay region of California. Also, this study explored possible mechanisms of retention to be used by administrators, counselors, and adult school educators.

The findings of this study indicate that there is no single reason why students leave school (Berliner & Barrat, 2009; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Fine, 1991a; Sum et al., 2009). Students drop out for a variety of reasons. The reasons ranged from feeling disconnected from the educational environment to viewing school as boring. High school students are being released from school after a certain age and sent to adult schools, skill centers, and occupational centers to complete their education.

For the purpose of this sequential mixed methods study, data were gathered from adult students using two surveys and one interview protocol. A correlational design was used to examine the relationship between the reasons they gave and their demographic characteristics. The qualitative data from the interviews identified students' perceptions regarding the value of a high school diploma. Additionally, the data yielded seven themes describing critical aspects of students' perceptions: academically adrift, emotional impact, employment, environmental influences, family and community support, family issues and school culture and climate.

There is a need to teach adult students about community colleges, 4-year universities, trade schools, A-G requirements, AB540 and financial aid for higher education. This would enable all students to have a plan upon graduating from adult school. There is also a need for adult schools to collaborate with high schools to address the topics of drop out recovery and credit recovery for high school students, thereby helping to close the graduation gap and decrease the dropout rate. Adult schools should take a closer look at drop out and credit recovery and make strides toward educating adult students beyond adult school by offering additional support and training toward transitioning adult students from adult school to college or higher education.

## REFERENCES

- 2nd Call. (n.d.). *Objective*. Retrieved September 22, 2010 from <http://www.2ndcall.org/>
- ACT. (2004). *Crisis at the core: Preparing all students for college and work* (Executive summary). Retrieved from [http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/crisis\\_exec\\_summary.pdf](http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/crisis_exec_summary.pdf)
- ACT. (2010). *The condition of college & career readiness 2010*. Retrieved from <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/cccr10/pdf/ConditionofCollegeandCareerReadiness2010.pdf>.
- Adult education*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/continuing+education>
- Aguirre, F. P. (2005). Mendez v. Westminster school district: How it affected Brown v. Board of Education. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 4, 321-332. doi: 10.1177/1538192705279406
- Allen, W.R., Bonous-Hammarth, M., & Teranishi, R. (2002). *Stony the road we trod: The black struggle for higher education in California*. Irvine, CA: University of California, Irvine.
- Associated Administrators of Los Angeles. (2012, January 16). Adult education: Beyond the numbers. *Associated Administrators of Los Angeles Newsletter*. Retrieved from <http://www.aalausd.com>
- Aud, S., Hussar, W., Kena, G., Bianco, K., Frohlich, L., Kemp, J., Tahan, K. (2011). *The condition of education 2011* (NCES 2011-033). Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011033.pdf>
- Berliner, B., & Barrat, V. X. (2009). When dropouts return to high school. *Leadership Association of California School Administrators*, 39(20), 8-10.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. K. (1998). *Foundations of qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006). *Racism without racist: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequity in the United States*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bridgeland, J. M., Dilulio, J. J., & Morison, K. B. (2006, March). *The silent epidemic: Perspectives of high school dropouts: A report by Civic Enterprises in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*. Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises.

- Brooks, R., & Goldstein, S. (2001). *Raising resilient children: fostering strength, hope, and optimism in your child*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- California Adult School fact sheet*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://californiaadultschools.org/cas/about>
- California Council for Adult Education. (n.d.) *History of the organization*. Retrieved April 22, 2011 from <http://www.ccaestate.org/history.html>
- California Council for Adult Education. (2011). *The importance of adult education* [DVD]. Available from <http://www.ccaestate.org/olmosVideo.html>
- California Department of Education*. (n.d.). Retrieved February 10, 2012 from <http://numbrary.com/sources/c1ee5367a2-califor-departm-of-educati>
- California Department of Education. (2005). *Adult Education Handbook of California*. Sacramento, CA: Author.
- California Department of Education. (2008a). *Annual report on dropouts and graduates using individual student-level data*. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr08/yr08re194.asp>
- California Department of Education. (2008b). *Testing and accountability, California High School Exit Exam*. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/resources.asp>
- California Department of Education. (2011, August). *2010-2011 California high school exit examination results released; achievement gap continues to narrow*. (News Release). Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr11/yr11rel59.asp>.
- Camenson, B. (2008). *Opportunities in adult education careers*. Lincolnwood, IL: McGraw-Hill.
- Castellanos, J., Gloria, A. M., & Kamimura, M. (2006). *The Latina/o pathway to the Ph.D.* Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Cavanaugh, S. (2003). More take college-entrance exams; Academic readiness is questioned. *Education Week*, 23(1), 13-14.
- Chapman, C., Laird, J., & KewalRamani, A. (2010). *Trends in high school dropout and completion rates in the United States: 1971-2008 compendium report*. Washington, DC: U.S Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
- Chapman, T. (2009). *The power of parental influence*. Martinsville, IN: Fideli.

- Clauss-Ehlers, C. (2009). *Encyclopedia of cross-cultural school psychology*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Cose, E. (1997). *Color blind: Seeing beyond race in a race-obsessed world*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009a). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009b). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cruz, G. (2009, November 16). Parent academies. *Time*, 74(19), 51-52.
- De Cos, P. L. (2005, November). *High school dropouts, enrollment, and graduation rates in California*. Retrieved from <http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/05/08/05-008.pdf>
- Denton, W. T. (1987). *Dropout, pushouts, and other casualties: Hot topic series*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa.
- Discrimination. (n.d.). Retrieved February 4, 2012 from, <http://wordcentral.com/cgi-bin/student?book=Student&va=discrimination>
- Dropout*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dropout>
- Fine, M. (1991a). *Framing dropouts*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Fine, M. (1991b). Invisible flood: Notes on the politics of “dropping out” of an urban public high school. *Equity and Choice*, 8(1), 30-37.
- Goodman, S. R., & Leiman, A. (2007). *College admission together: It takes a family*. Herndon, VA: Capital.

- Grossnickle, D. R. (1986). *High school dropouts: Causes, consequences, and cure*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.
- Gonzalez, A. (2007). *California's commitment to adult English learners: Caught between funding and need*. San Francisco, CA: Public Policy Institute of California.
- Govenar, A. B. (2007). *Untold glory: African Americans in pursuit of freedom, opportunity, and achievement*. New York, NY: Harlem Moon.
- Heppner, P. P., & Heppner, M. J. (2004). *Writing and publishing your thesis, dissertation, and research: A guide for students in the helping professions*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole-Thomson Learning.
- Hiatt-Michael, D. B. (2005). *Promising practices for family involvement in schooling across the continents*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age.
- Inglewood Community Adult School. (2005). *Self-study report: Focus on learning*. Inglewood, CA: Author.
- James, W. (2003). *The skin color syndrome among African-Americans*. Lincoln, NE: iUniverse.
- Johnson, K. R. (2003). *Mixed race America and the law: A reader*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Johnson, R. S. (2002). *Using data to close the achievement gap: How to measure equity in our schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Jones, D. (2010, Spring). State of the field. *Calprogress Newsletter*, IX, 3-4.
- Jones, R. K. (1984). *Sociology of adult education*. Brookfield, VT: Gower.
- Jones, S. L. (2002). *Rereading the Harlem renaissance: Race, class, and gender in the fiction of Jessie Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, and Dorothy West*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Kirst, M. W. (2001). *Overcoming the high school senior slump: New education policies*. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership.
- Kirst, M. W., & Venezia, A. (2004). *From high school to college*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Knowles, M. S. (1962). *A history of the adult education movement in the USA*. New York, NY: Krieger.

- Knowles, M.S. (1970). *The modern practice of adult education*. New York, NY: Association Press.
- Kollars, D. (2008, July 17). California high school dropout rate near one-quarter, report says. *The Sacramento Bee*. Retrieved from <http://www.sacbee.com/111/story/1088866.html>
- Levinson, (2002). *75 percent of students also work*. Retrieved from <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P1-52759853.html>
- Lincoln, C. E., & Mamiya, L. H. (1990). *The Black church in the African American experience*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Lindsey, R. B., Robins, K. N., & Terrell, R. D. (2003). *Cultural proficiency: a manual for school leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Los Angeles Unified School District. (2007, July). *Guideline No. 5: Adult basic education program*. Retrieved from [http://adultinstruction.org/administrators/bulletins/dace\\_bltng5.pdf](http://adultinstruction.org/administrators/bulletins/dace_bltng5.pdf)
- Marin, M. A., & Marin, A. D. (1991). *Research with Hispanic populations*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Martin, W. E. (1998). *Brown v. Board of Education: A brief history with documents*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- MacLeod, J. (1987). *Ain't no makin' it: Leveled aspirations in a low-income neighborhood*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2006). *Research in education: Evidence-based inquiry* (6<sup>th</sup> ed). Boston, MA: Pearson Education/Allyn and Bacon.
- Moro, S. Z., & Mercurio, J. A. (1988). *Eliminating senioritis*. *Gifted Child Today*, 11(4), 28-30.
- Muijs, D. (2004). *Doing quantitative research: In education with SPSS*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium (n.d.). *History of adult education act*. Retrieved from <http://www.naepdc.org/issues/aeahistort.htm>.
- Nieto, S. (1994). Lessons from students of creating a chance to dream. *Harvard Educational Review*, 64(4), 392-426. Retrieved from <http://www.hepg.org/her/abstract/341>

- No Child Left Behind Act. (2012). In *Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia*. Retrieved April 13, 2012 from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No\\_Child\\_Left\\_Behind\\_Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_Child_Left_Behind_Act)
- Not ready for college. (2006, March 2). *USA Today*. Retrieved from [http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2006-03-01-unprepared-for-college\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2006-03-01-unprepared-for-college_x.htm)
- Patterson, J. T. (2001). *Brown v. Board of Education: A civil rights milestone and its troubled legacy*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Planty, M., Hussar, W., Snyder, T., Provasnik, S., Kena, G., Dinkes, R., . . . Kemp, J. (2008). *The condition of education 2008*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2008/section2>
- Pole, T. (1969). *A history of the origin and progress of adult school*. New York, NY: Augustus M. Kelley.
- Porter, K. (2002). *The value of a college degree*. Retrieved from <http://www.ericdigests.org/2003-3/value.htm>
- Pytel, B. (2006). *Dropouts give reasons: Why do students leave high school without a diploma*. Retrieved from [http://educationalissues.suite101.com/article.cfm/dropouts\\_give\\_reasons](http://educationalissues.suite101.com/article.cfm/dropouts_give_reasons)
- Quinn, A. (2009). *Kai Ajala Dupe advocates for technology education among African American men*. Retrieved from <http://www.pepperdine.edu/pr/stories/2009/january/kai-ajala-dupe.htm>.
- Research and Education Association. (1997). *Authoritative guide to the TOP 100 careers to year 2005*. Pascataway, NJ: Author.
- Ruiz, V. L., & Sanchez Korrol. V. (2006). *Latinas in the United States: A historical encyclopedia*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Scales-Trent, J. (1995). *Notes of a White Black woman: Race, color, community*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Stillwell, R. (2009). *Public school graduates and dropouts from the common core of data: School year 2006–07* (NCES 2010-313). Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2010313>.



- Sulton, J. (2008). *African-American women pilots' perceptions of barriers to success in flight-training and strategies to enhance their presence* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA.
- Sum, A., Harrington, P., Bartishevich, C., Fogg, N., Khatiwada, I., Motroni, J., . . . Trub'skyy, M. (2003). *The hidden crisis in the high school dropout problems of young adults in the U.S.: Recent trends in overall school dropout rates and gender differences in dropout behavior*. Retrieved from <http://uk.emc.com/collateral/corporation/hsdropouts-crisis.pdf>
- Sum, A., Khatiwada, I., & McLaughlin, J. (2009). *The consequences of dropping out of high school*. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20000596>
- Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2001). *Using multivariate statistics* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Talburt, S. (2002, November). *Verify data*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the association for the study of higher education, Sacramento, CA.
- Tashakkori, A. (1998). *Mixed methodology: Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Thornton, B., Hill, G. & Usinger, J. (2006). An examination of a fissure within the implementation of the NCLB accountability process. *Education*, 127(1), 115-120.
- Titone, J. S. (1982) *Educational strategies for preventing students from dropping out of high school*. San Francisco, CA: R&E Research Associates.
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). *Fast facts: Dropout rates*. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=16>
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. (2012). *Federal TRIO programs: Current-year low-income levels*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/incomelevels.html>
- Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling U.S.-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Waggoner, D. (1991). *Undereducation in America: The demography of high school dropout*. Westport, CN: Auburn House.
- Washington, B. T. (1901). *Up from slavery: An autobiography by Booker T. Washington*. Doubleday, NY: Page & CO.

The White House: Office of the Press Secretary. (2009). *Expanding the promise of education in America*. Retrieved from [http://dpc.senate.gov/pdf/wh/fs\\_education\\_031009.pdf](http://dpc.senate.gov/pdf/wh/fs_education_031009.pdf)

Wodlinger, M. (2007). *Adult education: Understanding the adult learner*. Longwood, FL: Xulon Press.

## APPENDIX A

## Adult Student Survey/Questionnaire Demographics

**Part 1.** You are currently taking classes to meet the requirements for a high school diploma at a Community Adult School. Please complete this short survey. Please circle the answer that best applies to you.

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your gender?
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
3. Relationship status?
  - a. Single
  - b. Married
  - c. Divorced
  - d. Separated
  - e. In a relationship
  - f. It's complicated
  - g. Other \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your ethnicity? (Circle all that apply to you)
  - a. African American
  - b. Caucasian (White-non Hispanic)
  - c. Asian
  - d. Latino/Hispanic
  - e. Native American
  - f. Other, list \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is the Primary language spoken in your home?
  - a. English
  - b. Spanish
  - c. Other, list \_\_\_\_\_
6. What was your first language?
  - a. English
  - b. Spanish
  - c. Other, list \_\_\_\_\_
7. How many people live in your household counting yourself? \_\_\_\_\_
8. In a typical work week, how many hours do you work? \_\_\_\_\_

9. How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

10. How old were you when you dropped out of high school? \_\_\_\_\_

11. What was the last grade completed before dropping out of school? (Circle One)

11th   10th   9th   8th   7th   6th   5th   4th and under

12. Why did you drop out of high school? (circle all that apply)

- a. Poor academic performance
- b. Bored
- c. Illness
- d. Employment
- e. Pregnancy
- f. Discipline Issues (towards authority, women)
- g. Family Issues
- h. Gangs
- i. Drugs
- j. High school was not for me
- k. Other, Please list: \_\_\_\_\_

13. Did you have an IEP in high school?

- a. No
- b. Yes

14. Do you have any learning disabilities?

- a. Dyslexia
- b. Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)
- c. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder ADHD
- d. Other \_\_\_\_\_

15. What is your current grade level? \_\_\_\_\_

16. What is your current GPA? \_\_\_\_\_

17. What was your reading level upon entering school? \_\_\_\_\_

18. After you get your high school diploma, how likely are you to continue on to college?

- a. Not likely
- b. Somewhat likely
- c. Very likely

## APPENDIX B

## Adult Student Motivation Survey Questionnaire

**Part 1.** Students attend adult school for many different reasons. Below is a list of different reasons and some of them may apply to you. Please put a checkmark next to the ones that are true for you.

**Reasons that are true for you:**

A ____ To earn a high school diploma	L ____ Recovered from an illness, death of a loved one or family crisis
B ____ Need a diploma to gain employment	M ____ Sent by the courts
C ____ Tired of being poor/broke	N ____ To satisfy parole or probation requirements
D ____ Higher paying job	O ____ Parents/family demanded I return to school
E ____ To advance to a higher position within the company	P ____ Requirement for Statutory or Regulatory funding (GAIN/CalWORKs /TANF/GR/GROW/SSI)
F ____ Kids are grown up/older, can return to school	Q ____ Laid off work
G ____ Other employment-related motives (Salary increase)	R ____ Parenting obligation (program will only pay for child care if attending school, i.e. Crystal Stairs, etc)
H ____ Did not take high school seriously at the time but later in life realized a High School Diploma is necessary	S ____ Athletics (Scholarship consideration, College admission requirement)
I ____ Would like to be a role model for younger siblings/children	T ____ Other reasons not listed above
J ____ Must have a High School Diploma to enter college	
K ____ To boost confidence and self-esteem	

**Part 2.** Please comment on one or two of the potential reasons for returning to adult school that apply to you (limited to 100 words, use backside of the paper if needed).

---



---

**Note:** Based on your response, you may be selected to participate in a personal interview consisting of eight questions. Your participation is entirely voluntary and if you are interested to be contacted, you can include your preferred contact information on the backside of this paper.

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Protocol for Adult Students

1. Please explain why you left high school.
2. Please share why you wanted to receive your high school diploma.
3. What are your perceptions of receiving a high school diploma and how do you think you will benefit from obtaining your diploma?
4. Please describe your future educational and or vocational goals.
5. Who supported you the most while trying to obtain your diploma?
6. What strategies do you believe the schools could adopt to help students stay in school?
7. Please identify potential barriers that have prevented African American and Latino students from higher education after receiving a high school diploma.
8. Is there any additional information you would like to share about your experience concerning your high school diploma and higher education?

## APPENDIX D

## Script for Conducting Adult Student Surveys

Hello my name is Lisa Fears-Hackett,

I am conducting this study in order to obtain my doctorate degree in education and graduate from Pepperdine University.

First, I would like to thank you all for attending this assembly dealing with research concerning adult learners. Secondly, each of you has received a consent form and survey packet upon entering the room.

As previously stated, there are two surveys to complete, one with demographic information that will be fifteen questions and the other will be a list of twenty motivations that for one reason or another may have encouraged you to return to complete your high school diploma. All questions will either be “check the correct response, multiple choice, or two to three word replies”. There will be a space at the bottom of the survey for comments. Both surveys are stapled together and will take about thirty minutes to complete. This will be a paper and pencil survey; all pencils will be given to you in a moment.

You will have thirty minutes to complete the forms and please leave all forms in the box in front on your way out whether you choose to participate or not. For those that choose to leave immediately, you can drop your blank survey and consent forms in the same box. There will be light refreshments provided for all in the adjoining room.

## APPENDIX E

## Script for Conducting Adult Student Interviews

Hello my name is Lisa Fears-Hackett,

I am conducting this study in order to fulfill the requirement for completing a dissertation and earning a doctorate in Education with an emphasis on Leadership, Administration and Policy.

First, I would like to thank you all for volunteering to participate in this research study concerning adult learners. Secondly, you have received a consent form that you will need to complete. If you have not completed and turned in your consent form, please do so now (pause).

As previously stated, you will be asked to complete one face to face interview which will be approximately 50 minutes in length. The interview will consist of the following eight questions:

1. Please explain why you left high school.
2. Please share why you wanted to receive your high school diploma.
3. What are your perceptions of receiving a high school diploma and how do you think you will benefit from obtaining your diploma?
4. Please describe your future educational and or vocational goals.
5. Who supported you the most while trying to obtain your diploma?
6. What strategies do you believe the schools could adopt to help students stay in school?
7. Please identify potential barriers that have prevented African American and Latino students from higher education after receiving a high school diploma.
8. Is there any additional information you would like to share about your experience concerning your high school diploma and higher education?



I will tape record this interview and transcribe the notes to ensure accuracy. Please remember your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the interview process at any time. Only your age, ethnicity, gender and class status will be used when transcribing your interview. Are there any questions you would like to ask before we start (pause)?

Once you have answered all interview questions you are welcome to leave. Upon completing your survey there will be light refreshments in the adjoining room.

## APPENDIX F

## Superintendent or Designee Permission to Conduct Study

TO: Gary McHenry, Superintendent

FROM: Lisa Fears-Hackett, Assistant Principal Adult Education

DATE: March 26, 2010

SUBJECT: Superintendent or Designee Permission to Conduct Study

I would like your permission to conduct a research study at Inglewood Community Adult School as part of my doctoral dissertation at Pepperdine University. I am researching African American and Latino adult students' perceptions, motivations and barriers of a high school diploma and higher education.

The purpose of the study is to identify the motivations of African American and Latino adult school students returning to school to receive a high school diploma with dreams of attending college. The study will focus on community adult students perceptions regarding specific stimulus that have contributed to students returning to school for achievement growth. Once key causes are identified, the themes and patterns will provide suggestions for adult school administrators striving to close the graduation gap among student subgroups. Your district's participation in the study will contribute to knowledge and practices surrounding possibly retaining high school dropouts and also retaining adult students until they receive their high school diploma. Nearly 6.2 million students in the United States between the ages of 16 and 24 dropped out of high school in recent years. According to Editorial Projects in the Education Research Center 70 percent of all students in California graduate from high school with a diploma in four years. Thirty percent of the students are considered non-graduates or dropouts. There has been no research done to identify the reasons or motivations for adult students returning to school to receive their high school diploma. Most research regarding adult students relate to the GED or community colleges. Completing a high school education is essential in order to access higher education and training for the labor force.

If the adult school students agree to contribute, the students will be asked to participate in a twenty minute survey and a group interview regarding reasons for dropping out of traditional high school and returning to adult school to receive a high school diploma. I will tape record the interviews and transcribe the notes to ensure accuracy. Participants' identities will remain confidential and the interview notes and recordings will not be shared with others. The interview notes will be examined for common themes and used to identify students' perceptions, motivations and barriers of a high school diploma and

higher education. I will triangulate my data by interviews, questionnaires and reviewing documents. By using these methods it will increase the credibility and validity of the results for this mixed methods study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants who decide to participate are free to withdraw their consent or discontinue participation at any time. A copy of the informed consent and the interview protocol are attached for your information.

Please sign and return your approval by April 27, 2010. If you are unable to respond by that date, please send this approval as soon as possible.

Please return one copy of this signed form to:

Lisa Fears-Hackett  
Inglewood Community Adult School  
106 E. Manchester Boulevard, Inglewood, CA 90301.

You may also email the signed form to XXXXXXXXXX. If you have any questions regarding this study please feel free to contact me at XXXXXXXX or XXXXXXXXXX. If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding this study, you may also contact the researcher's supervisor Dr. Robert R. Barner at XXXXXXXX or XXXXXXXXXX.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, that you willingly agree for me to invite your site and staff to participate in this study, and that you give permission to the researcher to use the organizations name in the proposal and final paper, you will received a copy of this form.

Respectfully,

---

Lisa Fears-Hackett

Attachments:

Copy of Superintendent or Designee Permission to Conduct Study

I hereby consent to my school district's participation in the research described above.

---

School District

---

Superintendent or Designee Signature

---

Please Print Superintendent or Designee's Name

---

Date

## APPENDIX G

## Director of Adult and Career Technical Education Permission to Conduct Study

TO: **Sherryl Carter**, Director of Adult and Career Technical Education  
FROM: Lisa Fears Hackett, Doctoral Student Pepperdine University  
DATE: January 20, 2012

SUBJECT: Director of Adult and Career Technical Education Permission to Conduct Study

I am researching African American and Latino adult students' perceptions, motivations and barriers of a high school diploma and higher education. The purpose of the study is to identify the motivations, perceptions and barriers of African American and Latino adult school students returning to school to receive a high school diploma with dreams of attending college or higher education. The study will focus on community adult students perceptions regarding specific stimulus that have contributed to students returning to school for achievement growth.

I would like your permission to conduct two assemblies with the assistance of teachers, staff and counselors (if needed) at the Inglewood Community Adult School, Morningside campus. I will conduct one assembly in the morning and one in the evening during the break and or during class period. The assemblies will take place in the month of February or March of 2012. If students decide to participate they will complete two surveys and complete a standard consent form required for this type of study (see attached). Six students will be selected based on their desire of having dreams of attending college or higher education to participate in one-on-one interviews held at another time. These respondents will expand upon their perceptions of the importance of a diploma, higher education and or a college degree.

I will tape record the interviews and transcribe the notes to ensure accuracy. Participants' identities will remain confidential and the interview notes and recordings will not be shared with others. The interview notes will be examined for common themes and patterns used to identify adult students' perceptions, motivations and barriers of a high school diploma and higher education.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants who decide to participate are free to withdraw their consent or discontinue participation at any time. A copy of the informed consent is attached for your information.

I give permission to the researcher to use the organizations name in the proposal and final paper.

Please sign and return your approval by January 29, 2012. If you are unable to respond by that date, please send this approval as soon as possible.

Please return one copy of this signed form to:

Lisa Fears Hackett  
XXXXXXX  
XXXXXXX

You may also email the signed form to XXXXXXXX. If you have any questions regarding this study please feel free to contact me at XXXXXXXX or XXXXXXXX. If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding this study, you may also contact the researcher's supervisor Dr. Robert R. Barner at XXXXXXXX or XXXXXXXX.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, that you willingly agree for me to invite your site and staff to participate in this study, and that you have received a copy of this form.

Respectfully,

---

Lisa Fears Hackett

Attachments:

Copy of Director of Adult and Career Technical Education Permission to Conduct Study  
Adult Students Consent Form – Surveys  
Adult Students Consent Form – Interview

I hereby consent to the Adult School participation in the research described above.

---

School District

---

Director of Adult and Career Technical Education Permission to Conduct Study  
Signature

---

Please Print Director of Adult and Career Technical Education's Name

---

Date

## APPENDIX H

## 2nd Call Founder or Designee Permission to Conduct Study

TO: Skip Townsend, Founder/CEO  
 FROM: Lisa Fears Hackett, Doctoral Student Pepperdine University  
 DATE: June 01, 2011  
 SUBJECT: Founder/CEO or Designee Permission to Conduct Study

The purpose of the study is to identify the motivations of African American and Latino adult school students returning to school to receive a high school diploma with dreams of attending college. The study will focus on community adult students perceptions regarding specific stimulus that have contributed to students returning to school for achievement growth. Once key causes are identified, the themes and patterns will provide suggestions for adult school administrators striving to close the graduation gap among student subgroups. Your district's participation in the study will contribute to knowledge and practices surrounding possibly retaining high school dropouts and also retaining adult students until they receive their high school diploma. Nearly 6.2 million students in the United States between the ages of 16 and 24 dropped out of high school in recent years. According to Editorial Projects in the Education Research Center 70% of all students in California graduate from high school with a diploma in 4 years. Thirty percent of the students are considered non-graduates or dropouts. There has been no research done to identify the reasons or motivations for adult students returning to school to receive their high school diploma. Most research regarding adult students relate to the GED or community colleges. Completing a high school education is essential in order to access higher education and training for the labor force.

I would like your permission to conduct a research study at the 2nd call organization as part of my doctoral dissertation at Pepperdine University. I am researching African American and Latino adult students' perceptions, motivations and barriers of a high school diploma and higher education.

If the 2nd call adult students agree to contribute, the students will be asked to participate in a thirty minute survey and a potential interview regarding reasons for dropping out of traditional high school and returning to adult school to receive a high school diploma. I will tape record the interviews and transcribe the notes to ensure accuracy. Participants' identities will remain confidential and the interview notes and recordings will not be shared with others. The interview notes will be examined for common themes and used to identify students' perceptions, motivations and barriers of obtaining a high school diploma and higher education. I will triangulate my data by interviews, questionnaires and reviewing documents. By using these methods it will increase the credibility and validity of the results for this mixed methods study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants who decide to participate are free to withdraw their consent or discontinue participation at any time. A copy of the informed consent and the interview protocol are attached for your information.

I also give permission to the researcher to use the organizations name in the proposal and final paper.

Please sign and return your approval by June 10, 2011. If you are unable to respond by that date, please send this approval as soon as possible.

Please return one copy of this signed form to:

Lisa Fears Hackett  
XXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXX

You may also email the signed form to XXXXXXXX. If you have any questions regarding this study please feel free to contact me at XXXXXXXX or XXXXXXXX. If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding this study, you may also contact the researcher's supervisor Dr. Robert R. Barner at XXXXXXXX or XXXXXXXX.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, that you willingly agree for me to invite your site and staff to participate in this study, and that you have received a copy of this form.

Respectfully,

---

Lisa Fears Hackett

Attachments:

Copy of Founder/CEO or Designee Permission to Conduct Study

I hereby consent to 2nd Call's participation in the research described above.

---

School District

---

Founder/CEO or Designee Signature

---

Please Print Founder/CEO or Designee's Name

---

Date

## APPENDIX I

## Experts for Validation of Survey and Interview Protocol

(Name)

Thank you for your willingness to be a part of my doctoral study at Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Education and Psychology. As previously discussed, I am requesting your assistance in validating the survey instruments and interview protocol to be used in my study (handout).

I am proposing to investigate the perceptions, motivations and barriers of obtaining a high school diploma as perceived by African American and Latino adult students. My target population for the survey will include African American and Latino adult students in the Inglewood area, ages eighteen and older. The survey will also include an invitation for six of the respondents to participate in an in-depth interview.

The validation of the instrument requires that the content of the instrument will satisfy the aims of the study and research questions as previously discussed.

After completing your review of the survey instrument and interview protocol, please don't hesitate to make changes as necessary. Your signature of this statement will validate your consent in participating as an expert panel volunteer. Should you determine that this instrument will not accomplish the goal of my study or is harmful to the participants, please indicate your suggestions of modifications during our face to face meeting.

*Expert Panel's Signature*

---

*Date*

I have explained and defined in detail the research proposal in which the expert consents to participate. I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

---

*Researcher's Signature*

---

*Date*



## APPENDIX J

## Introductory Assembly with Adult Diploma Students

Script:

Hello. My name is Lisa Fears-Hackett. I am a doctoral student at Pepperdine University.

The purpose of my dissertation is to identify perceptions, motivations and barriers of earning a high school diploma and achieving higher education by adult students. I hope to find out from each of you, your reasons for returning to school. Should you be willing to participate, I will give you an informed consent form to read, fill out and sign. You will be given two survey questionnaires, the first will ask you information such as your age, gender, ethnicity, first language, and why did you drop out of school. These questions will be multiple choice. The second survey will be a list of motivations as to why you returned to school. Each of you will be asked to put a check mark by what applies to you at the end of each motivation and there will be a comment section if you choose to make a comment. After completing both surveys there will be light refreshments provided. You will have thirty minutes to complete the forms and please leave all forms in the box in front of the room on your way out whether you choose to participate or not. For those that choose to leave immediately, you can drop your blank survey and consent forms in the same box. Thank you.

## APPENDIX K

## Adult Students Consent Form – Interview

Protocol #: E1111D10

Project Title: *Perceptions, Motivations and Barriers of Earning a High School Diploma and Achieving Higher Education Among African American and Latino Adult Students.*

I authorize Lisa Fears-Hackett, M.S., M.A., a doctoral student under the supervision of Dr. Robert Barner in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University, to include me in the dissertation titled “Perceptions, Motivations and Barriers of Earning a High School Diploma and Achieving Higher Education among African American and Latino Adult Students.”

I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and will require me to complete one face to face interview approximately 50 minutes in length. I also understand, I will be audio taped and my words will be transcribed. I have been asked to participate in this study because I am an adult school student currently enrolled at Inglewood Community Adult School or involved with the 2nd Call organization and have information that may be useful to this study.

I clearly understand that my identity will be kept confidential and will only be known to the researcher should I consent to a follow-up interview. I also clearly understand that should I consent to a follow up interview only my age and initials will be included in this study.

I will be asked to answer eight interview questions during a face to face meeting. In turn, these questions will help answer the following research question:

1. How do adult school seniors perceive the value of obtaining a high school diploma, higher education, vocational programs, or a college degree?

I understand that there are no obvious risks of participating in this study. Although, if I disclose information during this personal interview related to child abuse, elder abuse or any other mental or physical abuse, the researcher will be obligated to break confidentiality and report to the necessary authority. I also understand that there is no direct benefit from my participation, but the study may benefit African-American and Hispanic adult high school diploma students. It may also provide suggestions for adult school administrators striving to close the graduation gap.

I understand that I have the right to refuse participation. Moreover, if I become uncomfortable at any time during the interview process, I can discontinue my participation and the results will not be used in the study. I also have the right to refuse to answer any question and understand that the researcher may find it necessary to end my participation in the study.

I understand that I will not be compensated, financial or otherwise, for participating in this study. I understand that if I have any questions regarding the study procedures, I can contact

Lisa Fears-Hackett, M.S., M.A., at (XXXXXX), or via email (XXXXXX) for answers. If I have further questions, I may contact Dr. Robert Barner at Pepperdine University XXXXXXXX. If I have further questions about my rights as a research participant, I may contact Dr. Yuying Tsong, Interim Chair, Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional Schools IRB at XXXXXXXX.

I understand to my satisfaction the information in the consent form regarding my participation in the research project. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have received a copy of this informed consent form which I have read and understand. I hereby consent to participate in the research as described herein.

---

*Participant's Signature*

---

*Date*

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

---

*Researcher's Signature*

---

*Date*

## APPENDIX L

## Adult Students Consent Form – Surveys

Protocol #: E1111D10

Project Title: *Perceptions, Motivations and Barriers of Earning a High School Diploma and Achieving Higher Education among African American and Latino Adult Students.*

I authorize Lisa Fears-Hackett, M.S., M.A., a doctoral student under the supervision of Dr. Robert Barner in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University, to include me in the dissertation titled “Perceptions and Motivations of Earning a High School Diploma and Achieving College Access among African American and Latino Adult Students.”

I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and will require me to complete one adult student survey demographics questionnaire and one adult student motivation survey questionnaire approximately 30 minutes in length. I have been asked to participate in this study because I am an adult school student currently enrolled at Inglewood Community Adult School or involved with the 2nd Call organization and have information that may be useful to this study.

I will be asked to answer seventeen questions from the demographics survey and check off reasons students return to adult school on the motivation survey. In turn, these questions will help answer the following two research questions:

1. What are the reasons given by adult school students for returning to adult school to receive a high school diploma?
2. Are the reasons given by the students related to their demographic characteristics?

I understand that there are no obvious risks of participating in this study. Although, if I disclose information during the survey relating to child abuse, elder abuse or any other mental or physical abuse, the researcher would be obligated to break confidentiality and report to the necessary authority. I also understand that there is no direct benefit from my participation, but the study may benefit African-American and Hispanic adult high school diploma students. And based on the data collected from the survey, six students, who plan to pursue higher education, will be selected as participants to complete one interview in this research study. I will be asked to provide my preferred contact information, if I am interested in being contacted to be interviewed in the next phased of the study, should I be selected. It may also provide suggestions for adult school administrators striving to close the graduation gap.

I understand that I have the right to refuse participation. Moreover, if I become uncomfortable at any time during the survey, I can discontinue my participation and the results will not be used in the study. I also have the right to refuse to answer any question

and understand that the researcher may find it necessary to end my participation in the study.

I understand that I will not be compensated, financially or otherwise, for participating in this study. I understand that if I have any questions regarding the study procedures, I can contact

Lisa Fears-Hackett, M.S., M.A., via telephone (XXXXXXX), or via email (XXXXXXX) for answers. If I have further questions, I may contact Dr. Robert Barner at Pepperdine University (XXXXXX). If I have further questions about my rights as a research participant, I may contact Dr. Yuying Tsong, Interim Chair, Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional Schools IRB at XXXXXXX.

I understand to my satisfaction the information in the consent form regarding my participation in the research project is true. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have received a copy of this informed consent form which I have read and understand. I hereby consent to participate in the research as described herein.

---

*Participant's Signature*

---

*Date*

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

---

*Researcher's Signature*

---

*Date*

## APPENDIX M

## List of Motivations – Matched to Authors

<b><u>Potential Reasons for Returning to School</u></b>	<b><u>Authors</u></b>
1. To earn a High School Diploma	1. Berliner & Barrat (2009) p.9
2. Need a diploma to gain employment	2. Berliner & Barrat (2009) p.9
3. Tired of being poor/broke	3. Kirst (2004)
4. Higher paying job	4. Kirst (2004)
5. To advance to a higher position within the company	5.
6. Kids are grown up/older, can return to school	6.
7. Other employment-related motives (Salary increase)	7. Wodlinger (2007)
8. Did not take high school seriously at the time but later in life realized I need a High School Diploma	8.
9. Would like to be a role model for younger siblings /children	9. Porter (2002)
10. Must have a High School Diploma to graduate college	10. Kirst (2007)
11. To boost confidence and self-esteem	11.
12. Recovered from an illness, death of a loved one or family crisis.	12. Berliner&Barrat (2009) p.9
13. No longer being pressured by gangs	14. Berliner & Barrat (2009) p.9
14. People with a HSD making more money	15. Porter (2002), Kirst (2004), Planty et al. (2008)

## APPENDIX N

## Topics Covered/Exact Interview Question

Topics Covered	Exact Interview Question
1. Benefits to the students	1. Question 3
2. Reasons for returning to school	2. Question 1
3. Demographic data	3. Question 2
4. Reasons for leaving school	4. Question 3
5. Future educational goals	5. Question 3
6. Barriers	6. Question 3
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.

## APPENDIX O

## Survey Questions Matched to Research Questions

<b>Research</b>	<b>Survey</b>
1. What are the reasons given by adult school students for returning to adult school to receive a high school diploma?	<p>A ____ To earn a high school diploma</p> <p>B ____ Need a diploma to gain employment</p> <p>C ____ Tired of being poor/broke</p> <p>D ____ Higher paying job</p> <p>E ____ To advance to a higher position within the company</p> <p>F ____ Kids are grown up/older, can return to school</p> <p>G ____ Other employment-related motives (Salary increase)</p> <p>H ____ Did not take high school seriously at the time but later in life realized a High School Diploma is necessary</p> <p>I ____ Would like to be a role model for younger siblings/children</p> <p>J ____ Must have a High School Diploma to enter college</p> <p>K ____ To boost confidence and self-esteem</p> <p>L ____ Recovered from an illness, death of a loved one or family crisis</p> <p>M ____ Sent by the courts</p> <p>N ____ To satisfy parole or probation requirements</p> <p>O ____ Parents/family demanded I return to school</p> <p>P ____ Requirement for Statutory or Regulatory funding (GAIN/CalWORKs /TANF/GR/GROW/SSI)</p> <p>P ____ Laid off work</p> <p>R ____ Parenting obligation (program will only pay for child care if attending school, i.e. Crystal Stairs, etc)</p> <p>S ____ Athletics (Scholarship consideration, College admission requirement)</p> <p>T ____ Other reasons not listed</p>
2. Are the reasons given by the students related to their demographic characteristics?	<p>1. What is your age?</p> <p>2. What is your gender?</p> <p>3. Relationship status?</p> <p>4. What is your racial ethnicity? (Circle all that apply to you)</p> <p>5. What is the MAIN language spoken in your home?</p> <p>6. What was your first language?</p> <p>7. How many people live in your household counting yourself?</p> <p>8. In a typical work week, how many hours do you work?</p> <p>9. How many children do you have?</p> <p>10. How old were you when you dropped out of high school?</p> <p>11. What was the last grade completed before dropping</p>



	<p>out of school?</p> <p>12. Why did you drop out of high school? (circle all that apply)</p> <p>13. Did you have an IEP in high school?</p> <p>14. Do you have any learning disabilities?</p> <p>15. What is your current grade level?</p> <p>16. What is your current GPA? After you get your high school diploma, how likely are you to continue on to college?</p>
<p>3. How do adult school students perceive the value of obtaining a high school diploma to further their future educational or vocational goals?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Please explain why you left high school.</li> <li>2. Please share why you wanted to receive your high school diploma.</li> <li>3. What are your perceptions of receiving a high school diploma and how do you think you will benefit from obtaining your diploma?</li> <li>4. Please describe your future educational and or vocational goals.</li> <li>5. Who supported you the most while trying to obtain your diploma?</li> <li>6. What strategies do you believe the schools could adopt to help students stay in school?</li> <li>7. Please identify potential barriers that have prevented African American and Latino students from higher education after receiving a high school diploma.</li> <li>8. Is there any additional information you would like to share about your experience concerning your high school diploma and higher education?</li> </ol>

## APPENDIX P

## Expert Panel of Adult Education Teachers

Ms. Michele Nichols

## EDUCATION

B.A. (English) LaSarbonne of France

B.A. (French) UC Irvine

M.A. UCLA 1973

## WORK HISTORY

Teacher at UCLA Extension 1973 - 1980

LAUSD 1976 - 2003 ESL, French, Spanish

ICAS 1995 - present

Syed F. Multani

## EDUCATION

B.Sc. (India), M.Sc. (Pakistan), M.S. (USC)

Biology, Chemistry, and Mathematics

## WORK EXPERIENCE

College Lecturer in Math and Science

Medical Technologist, Suter Memorial Hospital, Sacramento, CA

Math and Science Teacher, ICAS 1995 - 2012

Immanuel Fears

## EDUCATION

California Academy of Mathematics and Science

California State University, Dominguez Hills

B.A. Television and Film Directing, Minor - English

## WORK EXPERIENCE

Atherton Christian School - 3rd Grade Instructor

Harbor Church School - 7th Grade Instructor

Monroe Middle School - 6th and 8th Grade Instructor

ICAS English Department Chair

Stewart Oatman

## EDUCATION

B.A. Johnson C. Smith University

California State University, Dominguez Hills - Credentials

## WORK EXPERIENCE

CDC School Teacher

Inglewood USD Teacher 1997-Present

ICAS Social Studies Department Chair

## APPENDIX Q

## National Dropout Data

Table Q1

*Status Dropout Rates of 16- Through 24-Year-Olds in the Civilian, Noninstitutionalized Population, by Race/Ethnicity: Selected Years, 1980-2009*

Year	Total <sup>1</sup>	Race/ethnicity				
		White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	American Indian/Alaska Native
1980	14.1	11.4	19.1	35.2	—	—
1985	12.6	10.4	15.2	27.6	—	—
1990	12.1	9.0	13.2	32.4	4.9!	16.4!
1995	12.0	8.6	12.1	30.0	3.9	13.4!
1998	11.8	7.7	13.8	29.5	4.1	11.8
1999	11.2	7.3	12.6	28.6	4.3	‡
2000	10.9	6.9	13.1	27.8	3.8	14.0
2001	10.7	7.3	10.9	27.0	3.6	13.1
2002	10.5	6.5	11.3	25.7	3.9	16.8
2003	9.9	6.3	10.9	23.5	3.9	15.0
2004	10.3	6.8	11.8	23.8	3.6	17.0
2005	9.4	6.0	10.4	22.4	2.9	14.0
2006	9.3	5.8	10.7	22.1	3.6	14.7
2007	8.7	5.3	8.4	21.4	6.1	19.3
2008	8.0	4.8	9.9	18.3	4.4	14.6
2009	8.1	5.2	9.3	17.6	3.4	13.2

*Note.* Reprinted from *The Condition of Education 2011* (NCES 2011-033), 2011, by Aud et al. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011033.pdf>. Copyright 2011 by the National Center for Education Statistics. Permission pending.